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GARRISON SERMONS.

GARRISON SERMONS;

BEING

TWENTY DISCOURSES

PREACHED TO HER MAJESTY'S TROOPS IN THE

ISLAND OF MALTA.

35

BY

THE REV. J. T. H. LE MESURIER, M. A.

CHAPLAIN TO THE FORCES, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE DOWAGER LADY DE SAUMAREZ.

LONDON:
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TO HER MAJESTY,

ADELAIDE,

THE QUEEN DOWAGER,

TO WHOSE MUNIFICENT PIETY, AND EXALTED
CHRISTIAN ZEAL,
THE BRITISH INHABITANTS OF MALTA
ARE INDEBTED FOR A CHURCH
WORTHY OF THE NAME AND THE RELIGION OF
ENGLAND;

THIS SMALL VOLUME OF SERMONS,
PREACHED TO THE TROOPS IN THAT GARRISON,
IS,
WITH HER MAJESTY'S GRACIOUS PERMISSION,
MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY HER MAJESTY'S
FAITHFUL HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermons were delivered by the Author, in the discharge of his duty as Chaplain to the Forces. In regard to the style of their composition, it is, perhaps, needless to remark, that brevity and plainness are generally deemed desirable in such discourses.

They are now published under the encouragement of kind, it may be partial, friends. And, whatever may be their defects in other respects, the Author ventures at least to hope, that the thought and the language will be found alike practical and scriptural.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

CHRISTIAN LOYALTY.

Prov. xiv. 34.—"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." - 1

SERMON II.

THE ALL-SEEING EYE OF GOD.

Prov. xv. 3.—"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." - 17

SERMON III.

EZEKIEL'S COMMISSION.

Ezekiel ii. 3, 4.—"Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath

rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God." - - - - - 34

SERMON IV.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Psalm xcv. 6.—" O come, let us worship." - 48

SERMON V.

THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER.

Matt. xxvi. 18.—" The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples." - - - 66

SERMON VI.

CORNELIUS THE ROMAN SOLDIER.

Acts x. 22.—" Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God." - - 80

SERMON VII.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

1 *Sam.* xvii. 45.—"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." 95

SERMON VIII.

NOT TO CONSENT WITH SINNERS.

Prov. i. 10.—"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." - - - - 111

SERMON IX.

THE YOUNG MAN VOID OF UNDERSTANDING.

Prov. vii. 7.—"I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding." - 129

SERMON X.

THE GUILT OF SWEARING.

Matt. v. 34.—"But I say unto you, Swear not at all." - - - - 141

SERMON XI.

OUR SAVIOUR'S FIRST MIRACLE IN CANA OF GALILEE.

John ii. 11.—"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." - 158

SERMON XII.

THE EVILS OF DRUNKENNESS.

Prov. xxiii. 29—32.—"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colours in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." - - 172

SERMON XIII.

THE GUILT OF LYING.

Acts v. 5.—"And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all them that heard these things." 193

SERMON XIV.

ON DISHONESTY.

Exodus xx. 15.—"Thou shalt not steal." - 210

SERMON XV.

THE GUILT OF COVETOUSNESS.

Rom. xiii. 9.—"Thou shalt not covet." - 225

SERMON XVI.

JOSHUA'S CHOICE.

Josh. xxiv. 15.—"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve! whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." - - - 238

SERMON XVII.

DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON.

1 *Chron.* xxviii. 9.—"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the

Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. 254

SERMON XVIII.

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

Gen. xviii. 23—25.—"And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" - - 270

SERMON XIX.

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE.

Luke xiii. 6, 7.—"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three

years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" - - - - 284

SERMON XX.

TO RUN WITH PATIENCE.

Heb. xii. 1, 2.—"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." 299

GARRISON SERMONS.

SERMON I.

CHRISTIAN LOYALTY.

PROVERBS xiv. 34.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

THAT God, as being the Creator of the world, should exercise supreme dominion over the affairs of men, can be denied only by those who are ready to deny the fact of an Almighty and self-existing Being, the great and glorious Jehovah. The Almighty is indeed represented throughout the Bible as taking an ever-watchful

interest in the affairs of men, as ruling supreme "according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."[1] And not only are the most high and enduring rewards, even "glory and honour and immortality,"[2] offered to our acceptance and encouragement in "the way of righteousness,"—not only are the terrors of future and eternal wrath brought forward to deter men from the commission of crime, from the perpetration of all manner of sin and iniquity; but motives of present interest, of present honour and advantage, are brought forward and urged upon the attention, to persuade men to the observance and practice of whatsoever things are true, honest, just, and pure. And whether as individuals, or as members of society,—as we love our ownselves, or as we love the land of our nativity, the country whose name we bear, we are exhorted to "live soberly, righteously, and godly."[3]

[1] Dan. iv. 35. [2] Rom. ii. 7. [3] Titus ii. 12.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

When Moses began his farewell address to the children of Israel, recounting the goodness and the mercies of the Lord towards them, rehearsing the statutes and the judgments which God had delivered unto them to keep, he especially used this argument, he appealed to their patriotism, he appealed to their national and loyal feelings, as a strong and prevailing motive to the keeping of the commandments of the Lord. "Keep, therefore, and do them," were Moses' words of counsel: "for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."[4] So likewise, the valiant and illustrious Joshua, when, after a splendid course of victory, he was "going the way of all the earth," "called for all Israel,

[4] Deut. iv. 6.

and especially recommended to them, earnestly entreated them, to fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth," because on such their obedience depended the continuing favour, the blessing of God upon them as a nation. "It shall come to pass," said this noble captain, "that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you: so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you: when ye have trangressed the covenant of the Lord your God. Take good heed, therefore, unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God." [5]

And true and adapted to the times as were these exhortations when originally delivered, they are no less true and worthy to be had in remembrance now by a christian people.

The importance, indeed, and the value

[5] Josh. xxiii. 11.

of such a precept as we read in our text, cannot be gainsayed or denied by a people professing Christianity, for it stands on the everlasting truth of the sacred word of God most holy! It is found in the same volume of inspiration wherein we read—"Honour all men: love the brotherhood: fear God: honour the king."[6] "Render to all their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour."[7] If, my brethren, we fulfil not these and such like precepts, we comply not with, we neglect the commandments of God. And among what people soever a general neglect of such orderly and social conduct prevails, there requires not much foresight to pronounce that a people thus lawless and rude will never be distinguished or advanced in renown among the nations of the earth. Thus are our civil obligations, thus are our earthly duties, and the obedience we owe to God, intimately con-

[6] 1 Peter ii. 17. [7] Rom. xiii. 7.

nected together; and the impudent despiser of the moral and social precepts of the Bible has no more right to be called a lover of his country, than he who takes part with her open enemies. Every man, indeed, who has the prosperity of his country at heart, should very seriously consider the importance and truth of our text, "Righteousness exalteth a nation."

Thanks be to God! there is yet found among us as a nation that degree of attention to the claims which religion has upon our time and thoughts, as declares, that as a nation we deny not the superintending providence of God, that we are neither so proud, nor so reckless, as not to desire the blessing of God upon our public actions.

Fitting is it, my brethren, that the subjects of the British empire should ever devoutly acknowledge and seek after the favour and protection of that great and holy Being, the Lord Almighty, "whose kingdom ruleth over all;" "by

whom kings reign, and princes decree justice;" and to whom belongeth "the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for (such was the pious and thankful acknowledgment of David) all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as the head over all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all."[8]

Doubtless, my brethren, this acknowledgment, this proper feeling and conviction of God's pervading power and superintending providence, are the impelling motives which induce our rulers and commanders to call in the aid of religion, to call for the sacrifice of prayer, when the spirit of loyalty, of devotion to our king and country, may naturally be supposed to be more immediately stirring within

[8] 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12.

us. This was done not many days ago in this garrison on an occasion of special interest to military men, and most especially to the regiment whose colours are here before us.* "In the name of our God," said the Psalmist, "we will set up our banners." And your colours, soldiers of the —— regiment, have just now been unfurled and elevated in the same great and glorious name, "in the name of the Lord of Hosts." They have been delivered into your custody and care with the christian accompaniment of prayer unto God, that he would prosper, and bless, and succour "their going out, and their coming in." And it is becoming a christian regiment, that their colours should be so consecrated. It is neither unfitting, nor unmeaning, when a body of men receive those ensigns, which are the ensigns of earthly allegiance, the rallying point

* This sermon was preached on the Sunday subsequent to the presentation of colours to a regiment in the garrison.

in the day of battle, the pledge and token of union and loyalty—it is, we say, most fitting that the blessing of heaven should be invoked, and that a public and devout acknowledgment should be made where and on whom we rely for victory, honour, and prosperity. For is it on our own wisdom and riches, on our own strength and youth, that we rely, and rely fondly and solely? O how quickly may these fail! "Yea, even as a dream when one awaketh." And fearful and shameful may be our fall. And the triumph and the glory shall depart from us in the day when the Lord visits us for our forgetfulness and disrespect, visits us "for evil and not for good." "For them that honour me," said the Almighty by his prophet, "I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed."[9] Surely it is this sentiment which, as lovers of our own-selves, we should cherish: it is the sentiment or instruction conveyed in the

[9] 1 Sam. ii. 30.

words of our text, which, as lovers of our country, we should remember and observe. —"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Sin is indeed a reproach to any people, and to any profession. And however an evil custom and the light speaking of an age may have introduced and given sanction to the notion that this or that vice is more venial, more excusable in one profession than another, yet in the word of God we shall find no such dangerous distinctions. "He that doeth wrong," saith an apostle, "shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."[1] Soldiers, then, professing the christian faith, are to be told that it is equally incumbent upon them as upon others to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" and that rapine and cruelty, licentiousness and irreligion, are equally abominable in the sight of a pure, just, and holy God,

[1] Col. iii. 25.

whether these crimes be committed by the labouring husbandman, or by the trained warrior; and that both will hereafter be held accountable for the things in which they have wilfully offended and disobeyed the known and positive commandments and precepts of the Lord their God.

And to revert for one moment to the recent occasion which has given rise to these observations: the soldiers to whom the colours now before us have been so recently entrusted, are to be reminded, that as they would maintain the honour, as they would extend the fame of these, the standards of their regiment, they must themselves be diligent and exemplary in observing and doing all the commandments of the Gospel; and that as they would have the name of their regiment, and the approach of their colours respected and hailed with joy by the inhabitants of any town, or country whither they may be sent in the course of service,

they must be not only as a regiment exemplary for courage and obedience, but exemplary also as individual men for those virtues, and for that right principle of moral conduct, the fear and the love of God, which at once mark and elevate the character of a Christian. In a word, the practice of righteousness is essential to the well-being of any society, be it small or great. It is essential to its good name.

The Lord, indeed, in his fearful justice, as a punishment or trial to others, may, and does oft-times, permit wicked and profligate men and nations to flourish, and to be a scourge, and to go on in apparent triumph for a time. But let not such therefore "boast that they can do mischief." The wicked have therefore no cause for joy, no ground for security. "The countenance of the Lord is, and ever shall be, against them that do evil."[2] "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."[3]

[2] Psa. xxxiv. 16. [3] Rom. xii. 19.

The soldiers of England can never be too solemnly reminded how essential it is, individually and collectively, for their comfort and for their character, to be moral as well as brave men, to "fear God," as well as to "honour the king."

"Righteousness exalteth" them, but sin, if it abound among them, will sooner or later bring them into disgrace, and pain, and trouble. "Their sin will one day find them out."[4]

Be ye then, my brethren, not unmindful of your God. Your courage in the field is not doubted; your loyalty to your sovereign, your determination to abide by and defend your colours, and to maintain the honour of your country, is not to be questioned. But "be ye" further, thus did the gallant Joshua exhort the armies of Israel, "very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the Law,"[5] and in the Gospel of Christ. This shall be your praise; and this shall be to

[4] Numb. xxxii. 23. [5] Josh. xxiii. 6.

your everlasting honour. So shall ye best combine the respectable and glorious titles of Christians and Britons.

We may in truth behold in the colours of England the emblem and badge of Christianity, the vivid cross of the Saviour of the world. Looking up then with national and loyal feelings to the banners of our country, we may be happily reminded of our duty, of our faith and hope as Christians; and thus, whilst we vow all earthly, lawful, and stedfast obedience to the call and bidding of our king and country, we are, at the same time, to feel the necessity and propriety of fearing and loving and obeying HIM, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose service we, outwardly at least, profess to have enlisted ourselves. Let this then be our care; and be ye sure that it shall be to our everlasting praise.

Let piety as well as valour, let sobriety as well as manly endurance of toil, let righteousness as well as loyalty, mark the conduct, and be in the heart, of every

British soldier; and the blessing of Heaven shall be upon him.

He shall prove to his present comfort, and to his eternal gain the truth of the apostle's words, that "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."[6]

O Lord God Almighty, humbly confiding in thy gracious and superintending favour, we (again) dedicate these standards to the service of our king and country. May their defenders be distinguished not only for steadiness and valour, for humanity and fortitude in the hour of peril, and in the day of battle; but also for sobriety and discipline, for obedience and courteousness in the quiet and more peaceable days of their military service. And bless, O Lord, we beseech thee so bless "their going out and their coming in," that glory and victory, happiness and

[6] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

prosperity, may accompany their march for ever. Accept this our prayer, and graciously receive this our supplication for the sake and in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

SERMON II.

THE ALL-SEEING EYE OF GOD.

PROVERBS XV. 3.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

THERE are few doctrines of a more awful and stupendous character,—there are none which can strike our imagination with a deeper sense of the infinite extent of God's knowledge, and of the spirituality of his unsearchable nature, than the sublime doctrine which the wise preacher of Israel here puts forth in the words of our text: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." This

doctrine, if once permanently engraven on the tablet of the heart, is admirably calculated to strike at the root of all manner of sin and evil; and though it may not altogether prevent the forbidden thought, yet must it act as a powerful check on the commission of wickedness. For what, my brethren, is the information, the instruction herein delivered to us? but that the Almighty is at all times and in all places present with us, present to hear, present to behold our every word and action; that no darkness can be so thick as to be impenetrable to his sight, and no distance so great as to be beyond the reach of his immeasurable grasp. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."[1] This, even God's infinite and all-pervading knowledge is, moreover, not to be confined

[1] Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.

by us to mere external things; it is not to be restricted to the power of discerning only the outward actions of men. We are to know and to feel convinced that it extends much farther and more amazingly; that it reaches unto, and is thoroughly conversant with, the most secret and hidden recesses of the human heart. The Almighty is indeed to be considered and acknowledged by us as "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."[2]

Judging, however, from what we see and hear around us in the world, it might perhaps become a question, how far this sublime, this awful attribute of the Lord Jehovah is practically believed, or rightly remembered. It may not, surely it cannot! be fearlessly denied; but then the question arises as to its influence in the

[2] Heb. iv. 12, 13.

regulation of our every-day conversation and behaviour. The inattention and the thoughtlessness which the many betray in their words, the impudent defiance, and apparent recklessness as to future consequences with which men treat the solemn commandments of Heaven, might naturally lead to the conclusion, that the impious imagination wherewith the wicked in the Psalmist's days sought to encourage themselves in their licentiousness, was the prevailing opinion now; "Tush, say they, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." But, as the inspired writer instantly and unanswerably demands, "Take heed, ye unwise among the people; O ye fools, when will ye understand? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? or he that made the eye, shall he not see?"[3] Surely, my brethren, it must be a dangerous thing, and fraught with bitter consequences, to forget, habitually and perversely to

[3] Psalm xciv. 7—9.

forget, that "He is about our bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our ways."[4] "Woe unto them," as we read in Isaiah, "that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? Shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?"[5] Such is the beautiful and lofty language of Holy Scripture, at once reproving and instructing mankind concerning the stupendous nature, intelligence, and power of the great and almighty Father of the universe. And sober reason, the natural dictates of our conscience, must come to the same irrefutable conclusion, that the Creator and Governor of the Universe must necessarily possess wisdom and discernment, knowledge and power, in an infinite and surpassing degree.

But, my brethren, as believers in the

[4] Psalm cxxxix. 2. [5] Isaiah xxix. 15, 16.

glorious truths revealed unto the world in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as believing in that all-glorious revelation whereby "life and immortality have been brought to light," there is to us, if we may so say, an absolute necessity that the Divine Intelligence, God's knowledge and acquaintance with every thing, with even the most secret thoughts of the heart, should exist in boundless perfection, without limit, and without end. For take away this consummate attribute of the Deity; deny the doctrine of the Lord's omniscience; and how then shall an equitable decision be made hereafter; how shall a judgment in truth and righteousness be hereafter had upon all flesh, without respect of person? In what other manner shall the hidden thought of wickedness, and the evil deed of darkness, the guilt which the eye of man detecteth not, and the crime which cannot on earth be brought home to the wary and cool-blooded perpetrator; by what other means than

by the ever-watchful intelligence and all-pervading knowledge of the Supreme is the sin and the condemnation to be rightly affixed on the head of the guilty ones? "Though they dig into hell," said the Lord by his prophet, "thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence."[6] It is towards the omniscient and righteous Judge of all the world that the eye of slandered innocence must look for comfort, and support, and recompense in the sad hour of unjust accusation, when the evil report is favourably heard, and prejudice will not be open to conviction. To the heart bowed down in trouble and anguish, and left alone in its own bitterness, consolation will come in the conviction that its secret sufferings, its deep repentance, its fervent aspirations, are manifest unto, and will be truly judged

[6] Amos ix. 2, 3.

by Him, who "seeth not as man seeth."[7] Amidst the storms and vicissitudes of a giddy and noisy world, amidst the world's unjust frowns and the world's proud contumely, great shall be the hope of the believing heart, and timely courage shall be imparted by the assurance that honesty and simplicity, christian self-denial, and a patient continuance in well-doing, are virtues not overlooked, nor held of little account by him, "the High and Lofty One, who regardeth not the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of his hands."[8] O, how glorious, how animating to the troubled and harassed spirit is the assurance that above there is a Judge, excellent in counsel, whom no perjury can deceive, no sophistry blind, no violence terrify, or turn from pronouncing a righteous judgment! "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord searcheth the heart." Man's judgment may be, and often is, perverted by passion

[7] 1 Sam. xvi. 7. [8] Job xxiv. 16.

and self-interest, or it may be drowned in clamour, and hindered through violence. Prejudice may give a strong and pernicious bias, and ignorance of facts may cause much misapprehension and error in judgment. But neither can passion, nor clamour, nor prejudice, nor lack of knowledge, impede, or cloud the judgment of the great and Almighty Eternal, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."[9] To him ascendeth the sorrowful sighing of the contrite; and the prayer uttered in secret entereth into his ears. The aspiration of the meanest supplicant is known unto him, and however humility of deportment and meekness of carriage may be scorned and despised by a proud and thoughtless generation, yet are they, "in the sight of God, of great price."

Go on, then, ye "poor in spirit," and ye who desire and strive to walk before God with a pure heart and with clean

[9] James i. 17.

hands, be not ye utterly cast down, nor "troubled above measure," though the world may be frowning upon you, though present neglect may be your portion, or the world's dread laugh may be directed against your humble endeavour to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord." "Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him, and grieve not thyself, although they who do after evil counsels"[1] may be rioting, and apparently secure, in much worldly prosperity. No! "Be not thou afraid, though one be made rich, or if the glory of his house be increased."[2] No! Be not thou vexed in thy soul: but "keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last."[3] "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," according to his glorious Gospel, in that day there shall be no place of refuge,

[1] Psalm xxxvii. 7. [2] Psalm xlix. 16.
[3] Psalm xxxvii. 38.

"where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."[4] "Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering."[5] Think then upon this, and tremble, ye that are now going on in a perverse way, and are sinning with an high hand, and account that all is safe and well with you, so long as the world turneth not its back against you, and ye carry along with you a fair appearance, and the eye of man penetrates not into the hidden motives and principles of your conduct. Tremble thou worm, thou that exaltest thyself against the power of thy Maker, and forgettest the omnipotence of thy Judge.—"Know thou, that for all these things God shall bring thee into judgment."[6] A register is before the All-seeing One, and therein is noted down the "idle word," and the deceitful speech, the deed of darkness, and every forbidden act. O! how hollow will then become the once successful disguise of the hypocrite; and

[4] Job. xxxiv. 22. [5] Job xxvi. 6. [6] Eccles. xi. 9.

turned into how great pain will then be the joy of the sensualist! The curse of the profligate shall be returned on his own head; and despair and anguish shall then take possession of the heart of those who now "make a mock at sin." The mere outside show, the worldly splendour of the thing, which doth now so oft dazzle and deceive, shall then no longer have power to charm; neither shall it in any respect influence the final award and decision of the Great Eternal. "The poor and the rich shall then meet together;" and the piercing, the all-penetrating eye of Almighty Intelligence will not otherwise regard the persons of men, than as the record of their lives shall then appear.

Such, brethren, are among the awful consequences, such is the solemn and awakening lesson taught by the wise preacher of Israel: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." In short, no craft, no

policy, no acuteness of the intellect, neither strength of hand, can blind or deceive "the eyes of the Lord." Nothing is too high for his supervision, neither anything so low as to escape the knowledge of his watchfulness. "If I climb up into heaven," saith the Psalmist, "thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also."[7]

Solemn then, and momentous, must be the thought, that even from our childhood we are irrevocably destined, and are all hastening to stand before the judgment-seat of One, whose eye hath been ever upon us, and even shall so continue. O! be we fully persuaded, and be it written indelibly on the tablet of our hearts, that "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," hath at this very moment, and *always*, his eye fixed upon us; that he is with equal ease acquainted with the secret thoughts

[7] Psalm cxxxix. 7.

of our hearts, as he doth at all times hear and take cognizance of those more audible words, and those public actions of men, which are seen and heard in the high-ways of the city, and under the noon-day blaze of the sun. As, therefore, we are perpetually living in the awful presence of our Creator and our Judge, as "all things are naked and opened unto him with whom we have to do,"[8] let us attend to the wise counsel and determination of the Psalmist, and, like him, "set God always before us." Let us, that is, keep HIM, his all-pervading knowledge and his matchless power, his unchangeable truth and perfect holiness, continually present to our minds; and then it may be hoped that, under his divine favour, we "shall not greatly fall." "Thou, God, seest me," will be our watchword, and our rallying cry when temptations from without, and weakness within, are

[8] Hebrews iv. 13.

giving the enemy an advantage over us; when we are by our own fallen nature incited to commit sin, and to soothe ourselves because of its apparent impunity as to this world, or because others may be doing the like, and glory in their shame. Never, O never, let us run into the dangerous error, the sad and gross delusion of the reprobate, that "the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."[9] The youthful patriarch in the land of Egypt did not so foolishly reason, or seek to blind himself to the heinousness of sin, although, as to all human probability, his sin would have remained wholly undetected. No! his strong and righteous resolve not to consent to an evil solicitation, was evidently and rightly founded on the irrefutable doctrine put forth in our text, that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Indifferent, therefore, comparatively speaking, to him

[9] Psalm xciv. 7.

was detection or concealment, as referring to his fellow-men. He had a Master in heaven, whose ever-wakeful eye he could not escape; therefore, was it his stedfast determination to "keep innocency;" and his noble reply to the syren voice of the evil enticement, was in the memorable words—"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"[1]

Let us, brethren, pray for the like spirit of watchfulness and faith, that wholesome and continual remembrance of him, in whom "we live, and move, and have our being," that we may be kept from every presumptuous, and from every secret sin. And aware of the searching scrutiny which shall be had on the last dread day of solemn and severe account, when "every work, and every secret thing shall be brought into judgment,"[2] be it our right and persevering aim to do as the apostle exhorts, "And let us cleanse

[1] Gen. xxxix. 8. [2] Eccles. xii. 14.

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."[3]

[3] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

SERMON III.

EZEKIEL'S COMMISSION.

EZEKIEL ii. 3, 4.

"Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God."

THERE is much dignity, much to attract our attention, in the wording of this commission, which the Almighty delivered unto his servant Ezekiel, when he ordained him to be his prophet, and sent him to reprove and to exhort the children of

Israel, to declare the counsel and purpose of Jehovah concerning them, to vindicate Heaven's high truth, and the entire wisdom, justice, and mercy of the Almighty Father in all his dealings with a wayward and inconstant people. Most solemnly is the prophet adjured to acquit himself of his delegated trust with resolution and fidelity. "Thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions.—And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear."[1] With him, in his heart, and in the utterances of his tongue, there was to be no reservation, no timid, no time-serving policy. In godly sincerity, and under the authority of his, and their Master, he was not to shun "to declare unto them all the counsel of God." Thus only could he stand in the sight of God, "pure from the blood of all men."[2]

[1] Ezek. ii. 6, 7. [2] Acts xx. 26, 27.

Although he might meet with inattention or indifference on the one hand; and though more open scoffing and rejection of the word of the Lord might assail him on the other, yet was he still to speak, and to beseech the people not to be sinners against their own souls, not to delay, until the arrival of the day of the execution of God's fearful judgment, "to know that there hath been a prophet among them."[3] As in the chapter of our text, so likewise in other parts of this magnificent book of Ezekiel's prophecy, there are to be found most emphatic denunciations concerning the wilfulness and perverseness of the people, and which were pronounced evil and abominable in the sight of God, and bringing down that wrath which was, and did in the end come forth from the Lord. "Thus saith the Lord God. Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas! for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the

[3] Ezek. xxxiii. 33.

sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.—So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness towards Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am the Lord."[4]

Ah, brethren, a fearful time is it, and a time for trembling and great fear, when men will not know the Lord, nor acknowledge him, nor inquire after him! and so wait in hardness of heart and disobedience until the day of their calamity cometh, until the world is, as to them, no more; their prospects blighted and cut off by the chilling hand of mortal disease brought on, it may be, by their own ungovernable folly. Vain, indeed, is the attempt, guilty and ruinous in the extreme the mad purpose of those unto whom the Almighty hath vouchsafed to speak, to continue for ever in ignorance of the Lord. They shall not remain

[4] Ezek. vi. 11—14.

ignorant of and unscathed by his lightning-wrath, when he shall visit to judge the world.

The rebellious house of Israel and of Judah did seek to know the Lord, when they were reduced to much tribulation and anguish. And when insulted by their enemies, and being outcasts from their own pleasant fields, they had to eat the bitter bread of slavery, "full of the rebuke of the Lord," "By the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept, when they remembered thee, O Sion."[5] Where else, but unto the Lord God of their fathers, could they now turn for refuge and for hope? and whom did they more desire to seek than he, the Almighty One, the just and the holy, whose threatenings had not proved vain words, and whose arrows of vengeance, however long and in mercy delayed, had at length gone forth, and taken the sinner in his own naughtiness? Then was it, that they

[5] Psa. cxxxvii. 1.

knew the Lord in thunder, and by his judgments, whom they ought already to have known in "the still small voice," and "in the wealth" wherewith he had blessed them. But, "like as they had forsaken their Lord, and served strange gods in their land; so had they now to serve strangers in a land which was not theirs."[6]

And think ye, brethren, that in the word of the Lord spoken by his prophets to the children of Israel and the house of Judah—think ye, there is nothing to admonish, to awaken, and alarm us? "He that hath an ear" greatly doth it behove him to give good heed to these words; to be in his very heart convinced, that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning:"[7] and that however the foolishness of man may pervert his way, and however he may refuse to "hear the word that cometh forth from the Lord," yet that that "word

[6] Jer. v. 19. [7] Rom. xv. 4.

shall not return void,"[8] but that it shall be accomplished either in a blessing, or a curse. There may be, "there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."[9]

Therefore, as in the days of old, so now, the people of God, they who profess to be the servants and subjects of the Great Eternal—it is required of them to hearken unto the word spoken, to receive the messengers delegated to deliver the message, that they may hear—to understand and fulfil the terms of the covenant which "God in these last days" has made with man through his Son Jesus Christ. If the watchmen of Israel were solemnly enjoined of the Lord to speak unto the people, manifestly was it the duty as well as the interest of the people to give the ear to hearken. It was the prophet's commission to utter no vain or unimportant thing, but the awful realities of life and death, to place before

[8] Isa. lv. 11. [9] Prov. xix. 21.

the people the choice between good and evil, the favour or the displeasure of God; these were the stirring concerns propounded to their notice; and "whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear," their own destiny, their own welfare, stood perilled on the issue.

Brethren, we presume to say, that this statement strictly belongs to us, that it behoves us to make the application to ourselves, and to see that herein we are summoned and called, by every interest most valuable to us, to give diligent and glad heed unto the words spoken by Christ and his apostles through the appointed ministers of the Gospel. Brethren, we must not be that "impudent race and stiffhearted," thus becoming sinners against our own souls, and outcasts from the favour and loving-kindness of our God. The commission with which the ministers of the Gospel are now charged, though it cometh not to them with power of miracles, and furnishes them not of neces-

sary consequence with irresistible eloquence, yet is it not very dissimilar to the authority delegated to Ezekiel, and the Lord's servants, the prophets, in the days of Israel's probation. They "have, indeed, this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of men:"[1] but the name in which they speak is the same high and holy name "from everlasting" —"the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "Thus saith the Lord God." It was not of himself, neither to magnify himself, that the prophet was bidden to speak unto the people; neither did he desire so to do. And, in truth, the people themselves confessed to, and were aware of this. "They spake one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord."[2] And the present ministers of the Gospel, for the truth's sake, and because on none other

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [2] Ezek. xxxiii. 30.

ground can they hope to prevail in their speaking—he, brethren, the individual who now addresses you, wherefore do you listen to him? and why does he demand your attention? but because, whether he speak "for doctrine, or for reproof," he refers himself to the Bible, he looks into, and speaks from the written word of God, and thence is authorized to declare,—"Thus saith the Lord God."

Therefore, "be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."[3] Imitate the noble and worthy conduct of the Bereans, praised by the sacred historians. These noble converts to the faith preached unto them, tested the truth, and weight, and worth of what they heard, by a patient reference to the written and acknowledged word of God. "They," it is said, "searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so."[4] Therefore did many of them believe. They became "wise unto salvation through

[3] Ephes. v. 17. [4] Acts xvii. 11.

faith which is in Christ Jesus."[5] Therefore did they not come, neither must any of us, my brethren, come in the folly and sinfulness of Ezekiel's hearers; they came, that is, to hear, but not to do; they came in idleness, or in listlessness, or out of mere curiosity, certainly not from a desire of "instruction in righteousness," or to be advised for their good:—"for their heart," it is stated of them, still went after their covetousness."[6] And so, however faithfully delivered, the word profited them nothing. They were inwardly set, predetermined, as we may say, "not to do it:" and the marvellous loving-kindness of the Lord, in sending all his servants, the prophets, to admonish, reprove, "and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine"[7] was utterly in vain: and "to Israel he said, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."[8]

[5] 2 Tim. iii. 15.
[6] Ezek. xxxiii. 31.
[7] 2 Tim. iv. 2.
[8] Rom. x. 21.

O! my brethren, "be not we rebellious, like that rebellious house." Let us not in self-conceit, or out of mere indolence, make a "mock at the counsel of the Lord." Nothing can be more important, nothing more true, nothing more solemn, than the words of that book, the written oracles of God, which you hear read and expounded to you every Sabbath-day. They are, in plain and simple truth, "the words of eternal life," and "shew unto us the way of salvation." "With meekness," with patience, with docility, yea, with all readiness of mind, are we to "receive the engrafted word which is able to save our souls,"[9] that we may walk in the statutes of the Lord, and keep his ordinances, and do them. "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for them, whose heart walketh after their detestable things, and their abomi-

[9] James i. 21.

nations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord God."[1]

Most awful and responsible, whether as regards ministers or people, is now the situation of the christian multitude. If fidelity and diligence in delivering the word be required on the one hand, the heart's desire to hear, nay, more, the firm resolve to profit with God's grace by the hearing, is equally requisite on the other. In a word, if either minister, or people do not well, sin lieth at the door, against each man individually. And when this life being ended, and after the long sleep of the grave, the archangel's trumpet shall awaken christian men to judgment; then, brethren, shall it be good: yea, a joyful and happy hour shall that awakening be to those, who in singleness of heart have attended to the word which came forth from the

[1] Ezek. xi. 20, 21.

Lord," and have in obedience, and in the full assurance of faith, submissively "bowed the head "[2] to the solemn declaration stamped on every page of the Bible, "Thus saith the Lord God."

[2] Exod. iv. 31.

SERMON IV.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PSALM XCV. 6.

"O come, let us worship."

THESE words, and the Psalm from which they have been selected, must doubtless be familiar and well known to us. The whole context contains an eloquent appeal to our better feelings for the cheerful payment of that homage, and adoration which is due from the creature to his Creator. "He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

Every better principle, therefore, of our nature should incite us to the continual offering up of an heartfelt sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, and prayer.

It has been well ascertained that this 95th Psalm has, from the earliest ages of the christian church, been repeated at the beginning of the morning devotions, a custom derived, it appears probable, from the usage of the ancient church of God at Jerusalem. And, indeed, when we consider the words of the Psalm, the invitation contained therein, and the argument on which such exhortation is founded, we surely shall not be slow to appreciate and accept it, as a fitting introduction to that sacrifice of praise, and that devout hearing of the word, and those fervent supplications for divine grace and spiritual help and blessing, which are among the subsequent portions of our excellent Liturgy. In this 95th Psalm we are exhorted and encouraged to offer our adorations at the footstool of the Most

Holy with every mark of outward reverence, as well as with that true devotion of the heart, that holy attention and inward consideration which can alone render our attendance in the house of God a fitting or "a reasonable service."

With respect to the propriety of both:—and, first of all, with respect to the necessity and fitness of the former; that it is required of us to demean ourselves with outward respect; surely, my brethren, little need be said to convince you. What are we? What is man, but a creature composed of soul and body, a spiritual essence and a fleshly frame? and God is the workman equally of both. "He made us, and not we ourselves." "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."[1] And whilst the Psalmist here bids us to "worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker,"—the apostle Paul admonishes us to "glorify

[1] Gen. ii. 7.

God in our body and in our spirit, which," saith he, "are God's."[2] But that our bodies, in outward reverence and respect, must accompany the devotional aspirations of the heart, will be further manifest, and indeed self-evident, when we take into our consideration the general scope and address of this 95th Psalm. It is not addressed so much to any one of us individually, as to men in general, as a collected body of public worshippers. It was so originally addressed to the congregation of Israel, and it is now to the assembled together in Christ's name, that the words of exhortation in this Psalm are applicable. The appeal is, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord! O come, let us worship!" "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

We stop not here, my brethren, to tell you in detail of the antiquity of public worship. As far as the annals of sacred and profane history extend, they alike

[2] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

bear testimony, that man in all ages of the world has been accustomed to pray,—has found it agreeable to his nature to adopt some outward forms of public devotion. More particularly, however, the people to whom were committed the sacred oracles of God, that nation through whom Christ came—on them was enjoined, and with much precision, the stated observance of outward rites, and various public sacrifices. The law, to them, was not only moral and religious, but ceremonial and peculiar: and the people who were under covenant with the God of Israel, were bound, at fixed and solemn periods, to present themselves before the Lord, "in the place where he had chosen to place his name there."[3] And although by the coming of Christ in the flesh,—although, through the preaching and establishment of his universal Gospel, the types and shadows, the former and legal sacrifices, and the costly oblations of the old covenant, have been super-

[3] Deut. xiv. 23.

seded, they being only "a shadow of good things to come;" yet it is evidently a becoming duty, and more than ever fitting, that God's name should in these after ages be equally treated with public honour, and that his worship and service should still be celebrated and observed in the public congregation of the faithful. Prophecy in holy anticipation had announced this, had guarded against any misrepresentation in this matter: and the word of Christ having clearly taught us our duty in this respect, we as Christians are to understand ourselves as commanded, no less than were the Israelites of old, to pay public homage unto God; for we likewise possess, as they did, a sweet promise of acceptance and favour. "For," as said our Lord himself, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." * And for what purpose, my brethren, wherefore has the holy rest of the Sabbath been given to us, if it is not to be sanctified by

* Matt. xviii. 20.

public prayer, thanksgiving, and praise? Wherefore are we commanded to rest one day in seven from the ordinary routine of our worldly work and occupation?—wherefore is it desirable that we on the Sunday put away from us, as much as may be, the drudgery and the dirt, the turmoil and the fag, of this life's feverish strife?—wherefore this hallowing and separation?—if the Sabbath be not thankfully and profitably given up to God, to his honour and service; that we may on that day frequent "the habitation of God's house," and be therein glad, and rejoice for all the good wherewith we have so undeservedly been blessed?

Great, my brethren, great and valuable ought we to account the privilege and the opportunities of social and public worship; although it may be feared that, like most other goods in possession, we do not appreciate the blessing and the privilege sufficiently as we ought to do. The many are slack and remiss, when they ought to be zealous and ready: and

excuses most frivolous shall be brought forward, and causes most idle shall be allowed to interfere with, and to prevent our attendance at that public and religious assembling of ourselves together, which as it is our duty, and for our own spiritual profit, so ought it to be our pleasure and delight.

The word of God by his prophet to Israel, full as it is of temporal promises and blessings more peculiarly belonging to them as a nation, is nevertheless full of instruction and encouragement to us. "If," as the pen of Isaiah was commanded to write, "thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him; not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee

with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."[5] "The mouth of the Lord," my brethren, hath solemnly declared, "them that honour me I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."[6] And we may not lightly pass over these words, or think to disregard them with impunity. If, on the holy rest of the Sabbath, we are not merely reluctant to come to the house of God, but if, as it is to be feared is the case with many, we wilfully, and idly, and absolutely without any cause but our own perverse dispositions, refuse publicly to worship the Lord our God, is it likely that we shall in other respects keep holy the Sabbath-day? And how many, think ye, of those who thus draw back, will worship him in private, or in any way attend to the other sacred duties of the day? We dare affirm of those who come not to church when they can,—and leisure for

[5] Isa. lviii. 13, 14. [6] 1 Sam. ii. 30.

which, by the way, many by a little steady forethought might make for themselves,—that they, thus negligent of God's invitation, will be much tempted, and do oftentimes outrageously profane the Lord's day by acts of gross criminality, by acts not of mere idleness, but by positive sins, by sensuality and profligacy. They cast away the thought, they despise the service of the Lord of Hosts, and they are in strict justice abandoned by him to reap the bitter consequences of their own rebellion and sin. "Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as the dust."[7]

It were idle, my brethren, to seek to deceive ourselves in this matter, or to deny the fact that the generality of us are not altogether what we ought to be as concerning our attendance on the public worship of our church, giving little heed to the bidding of prayers, or to the more solemn and peculiar ordinance of the

[7] Isa. v. 24.

Gospel by attending at the Lord's table. Happy they, and thankful will they be, whose consciences can in this respect give them "an answer of peace;" who, with holy David, "love the habitation of the Lord's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth;"[8] and who are "glad when they hear said, We will go into the house of the Lord."[9]

Suffer, however, my brethren, some of you to be asked; and question honestly within yourselves, whether you would at this moment be now here of your own accord,* whether the benevolent and christian orders promulgated by your superiors have not had more constraining force to bring you here, than the force of conscience, and the heartfelt conviction, "that it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord;" that to assemble ourselves toge-

[8] Ps. xxvi. 8. [9] Ps. cxxii. 1.

* The non-military reader is reminded, that the regiments in garrison are every Sunday regularly paraded, and marched in a body to divine worship.

ther in public congregation on the Lord's day is at once a profitable act, and one becoming a christian people. If, my brethren, some great, some difficult, some painful thing were demanded of you,—if your worldly prospects were thereby clouded,—if your worldly comforts were thereby diminished,—why then, even then, "your instruction in righteousness," the nourishment of your souls unto life eternal, the doing the good pleasure of God, should not be neglected. But what the privation? what the difficulty? and wherefore then a refusal to the kindly invitation of, "O! come let us worship?" O! it is a pleasing and a grateful thing to see the courts of the Lord's house thronged with attentive worshippers. It is an animating and glorious sight to behold the majority of a nation acknowledging in public and religious acts that they have taken the Lord to be their God. "Happy the people who are in such a case."[1]

[1] Ps. cxliv. 15.

And such, brethren, is our position; or if not, it is our own fault. We are not deprived of opportunities, we have not to look about for the leisure to attend the public services of our church. Morning and afternoon are the doors of this house of the Lord open for your admittance. And it were well, it would rejoice the heart of him who now addresses you, could he see a more numerous attendance at the Sunday evening sacrifice of thanksgiving and prayer—a more numerous attendance from amongst those to whom the holy rest of the Sabbath from the weekly routine of labour is so benevolently insured by the laws of our country. Speaking to some among you, the preacher might say, Why do ye, fathers, it may be, of families, and mothers of children, act as the perverse and disobedient child? Why do ye attend here, only when ye are, as it were, compelled? Why be loath, why be reluctant, why negligent of your religious services, when it is left to your own right feelings and sober judg-

ment whether ye will pay public homage to your God, or not? And what do ye, if ye stay at home, or lounge away that hour in your barrack? Are ye the better for thus idly refusing the evening invitation, "O come, let us worship!" Will attendance at the house of God in any way prevent the innocent recreations of the Sabbath, the social walk, or the rational conversation? "The Sabbath," my brethren, "was made for man."[2] And whilst no one work of necessity, or charity is forbidden, whilst the strict letter of the Mosaic law is not now required of Christians, it is becoming, and expected of a christian people, that they reverence the Sabbath, and use it for the all-wise and merciful purposes for which it was ordained.

"Be ye then not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is,"[3] in regard to the holy observances of his sacred day,—"Give the Lord the honour

[2] Mark ii. 27. [3] Ephes. v. 17.

due unto his name; worship the Lord with holy worship."[4] And further, remember, that there is something else than mere outward profession required of us, when we present ourselves before the Lord within his sanctuary. We must be careful to "lift up our hearts with our hands."[6] We must be properly alive to the necessities of our case. We must be deeply impressed with the urgency which calls on us to have Christ for our prevailing Intercessor, our "Advocate with the Father:" for through whom else can we be pardoned our many transgressions in this our day of folly and weakness? O! beware we, and let us be instructed, and take warning by the words of this 95th Psalm,—O let us "not harden our hearts!" —we may so harden them as to be deaf to the calls of the Gospel; and the sound of the church-bell may at length fall unheeded on our ears; and so callous may

[4] Ps. xxix. 2. [6] Lam. iii. 41.

we "through the deceitfulness of sin"[6] become, as to attend the services of our church in listless apathy, for form's sake, or only in obedience to orders. But, my brethren, "To-day if ye will hear his voice,"[7] to-day if ye will make provision for your soul's health, to-day if ye desire not to pervert the holy ordinance of the christian sabbath, "harden not thus your hearts:" remember this day, and its weekly return, to keep it holy, to sanctify it to all godly and christian purposes; resolve henceforward to come hither, to attend the Lord's own house of prayer, weekly, and regularly, gladly, and devoutly. Whatever, or rather however imperfectly, the instructions and the doctrines of our holy faith may be delivered from this place by the mouth of a man fallible as yourselves, yet know, that you can at all events do your duty, your religious duty and service. You can here offer up statedly, and as required, the sacrifice of

[6] Heb. iii. 13. [7] Ps. xcv. 8.

prayer; here you shall hear the word of God read to you; here you can pour out your thanksgivings; and here the praises of your lips shall not ascend unnoticed before God.

However lightly, my brethren, the wayward heart of man may, in the day of his youth and health, think of these things, yet are the privileges and the comforts of public worship nothing light, or despicable. The worth, indeed, and the importance of christian institutions, and Sabbath observances may be little thought of, and too late known; but think ye that the word was to be vain, which commanded from Mount Sinai, amidst thunder and lightning, "Remember, that thou keep holy the Sabbath day?" or that the milder word of the Redeemer's promise, which said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,"[8] was a mere cold utterance of the lips without meaning, or

[8] Matt. xviii. 20.

a mere word of promise never to be fulfilled? However, then, others may foolishly, and thoughtlessly make light of, and cast God's word behind them, let us, my brethren, take to ourselves this promise, nothing doubting but that a blessing will follow, if we, in the spirit of the Psalmist's address, give ourselves, heart and hand, to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."[6]

[9] Psalm xcvi. 9.

SERMON V.

THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER.*

MATTHEW xxvi. 18.

"The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples."

THE transactions connected with the history of the death and passion of our Saviour are of a highly solemn, of an infinitely interesting, and, we should add, of an awfully mysterious character. By the passion of our blessed Saviour, we are to understand those sufferings, that agony and torture both of body and soul, which he endured, as the hour of his death drew

* Preached on the Sunday next before Easter.

on, and at length arrived, amidst the bitter scorn and revilings of the multitude, the desertion of his friends, and the outrageous malice of his remorseless enemies. In the chapter of our text we have an account of some of those transactions in which our Lord bore so conspicuous a part, and in which his humility and patience, his submission to the will of his Heavenly Father, and his unextinguishable love for those whom he came to save, are narrated in all the simple eloquence of heavenly truth, and matchless wisdom. In his divine knowledge Jesus our Lord knew all that was to happen unto him. He knew, that in the counsel of the Supreme, and to satisfy the claims of Almighty justice, it was necessary that he should thus suffer. As he had repeatedly alluded to this, the closing period of his life, during his ministry on earth, so did he, as the hour approached, speak more and more distinctly, pointing to the precise moment when it would be "the hour of his ene-

mies, and the power of darkness." Accordingly we hear him, as in the commencement of this chapter, declaring unto his disciples, "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."

The Passover was the great and solemn feast of the Jewish people, divinely instituted in remembrance of the powerful interposition of the great goodness of God then in exercise towards them, in wonderfully preserving them alive, whilst the destroying angel passed through the land, smiting the first-born of the Egyptians, but withholding the sword, and passing over the houses of the Israelites. An ordinance then issued forth from the Lord, commanding the sacrifice and the eating of a lamb, in grateful commemoration of this event, so long as Israel should continue a nation; until a mightier, a greater, a more universal deliverance had been effected by One, of whom the annual paschal lamb was the express type and figure.

It was to the observance of this ordinance that the message, of which our text forms a part, was given. It was Christ's determination, it was his unwearied aim, "to fulfil all righteousness," to be in all things an example and a pattern to those who throughout after generations should believe in him. And whilst, as we read, he gathered his disciples around him, to celebrate God's mercies towards the house of Israel as a nation; he embraced the opportunity of recommending, of commanding their adoption of an expressive, a solemn rite, to be for ever commemorative of his own death, the offering up of that life, which he freely gave, that sinners might be reconciled to God, and man redeemed unto life eternal.

The words of direction,—the words of our text, which our Saviour employed when he bade his disciples to prepare, plainly intimated that there was to be something peculiarly solemn and marked in the observance of this the annual feast,

of which they were then about to partake. "The Master saith, my time is at hand." The time predicted, the time prefigured, the day and the hour had arrived when a new era was to open upon the world. And to the Jewish nation, and to mankind in general, was now about to be preached, and be made manifest, the great truth, that, "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God." [1]

To this preaching, my brethren, to this great truth, we must not turn a deaf ear; and whilst we read and contemplate the many solemn events which took place during the closing days of our Saviour's mortal career, we must not fail to be instructed thereby, and rightly to under-

[1] Heb. ix. 13.

stand the nature of that life and conversation which a right faith in "Jesus Christ and him crucified," so peremptorily demands.

It is to be lamented that the solemn events immediately belonging to, or connected with the death of Christ, should be in too many instances with so little practical and abiding effect annually commemorated among us. We desire indeed no mere formal, no mere outward, no mere pageantry recollection* of what Christ, the spotless Lamb, the anointed Redeemer of the world, did, and spake, and suffered, when "His time was at hand;" but we would have these things which "belong to," and which were wrought for, our "peace" and for our salvation,

* On the eve of Good Friday a procession is made through the streets of Valetta by the Romish priesthood, and in which are carried on men's shoulders various large figures, or groups, representing the different scenes of our Lord's passion, crucifixion, and burial.

to be ever and again renewed and deeply engraven on the hidden tablet of the heart, there to bloom, and there to bring forth fruit unto life eternal; that, according to St. Paul, "the life we now live in the flesh, we may live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us."[2]

And for what purpose were such solemn preparations made, and why did Jesus so particularly charge, and so affectionately speak to his disciples, and why have the circumstances of the last passover of which our Lord partook with his disciples, been so minutely recorded, if these things did not involve matters of the deepest concern to the christian world, if events of vast importance were not then transacted; and that our hearts should thereby be moved to something like gratitude; and that we should inquire and see, and constantly bear in mind, what the Lord would have us to do?

[2] Gal. ii. 20.

At the last passover of which Jesus partook, a more spiritual feast was instituted, and bread was then broken, and wine was then blessed, for a holy and sublime purpose, and as a grateful acknowledgment for a mightier and more universal deliverance than the mere temporal rescue of one nation only from an earthly bondage. Christ was desirous to eat this passover with his chosen disciples, because it was his purpose, and he did then commend to the observance of his followers the perpetual remembrance of the deliverance which his death, his most precious blood-shedding, would achieve for them and "the whole world." And it is difficult to say, it is hard to imagine, how any one, with the Bible in his hand, hoping, trusting for deliverance from the woe and condemnation of the "second death," for salvation through the great atonement made on the cross;—it is, we say, not easy to comprehend how any one thus believing, can overlook the importance, the strong

obligation, which attaches to the observance of a rite commemorative of that great sacrifice, and which, when our divine and loving "Master's time was at hand," he himself requested and enjoined on the band of the faithful to observe and to do. If the former, the Jewish feast of the passover was binding on that nation;—if on the arrival, if on the completion of that greater sacrifice which it prefigured, it became abrogated, that is, superseded;—can it be in reason supposed that Christians are emancipated from every act of religious observance peculiarly connected with the antitype, the fulfilment of the prophetic promises of God; or that no positive, no outward act of remembrance is now required of those who profess to be the disciples of a crucified Master? Whatever it may be the fashion of a lukewarm age to think, or however vague and undefined may be the notions which some entertain concerning the virtue and necessity of religious ordinances and sacred

institutions; and however great may be, on these points, the laxity of opinion and practice which hath crept in among us, —yet the simple and irrefutable fact is, that Christ Jesus did enjoin his disciples to remember him in a particular and appointed manner; and not to mention other passages of Scripture, we have only to refer to the 22nd chapter of St. Luke, to be certified of this fact. It remains then with men themselves, and as they will have to answer before God, to reconcile to their consciences this so frequent, so avowed, so unblushing a neglect of a positive ordinance, such as is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which, as we learn even in our infancy, was instituted and ordained by Christ himself, "for the continual remembrance of his death, and of the benefits which we receive thereby."[3] We are to remember, my brethren, that this is the distinguishing rite of Christi-

[3] Church Catechism.

anity. We are to remember, that as it is a commanded duty, so are the benefits great to the faithful communicants—even "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine:"[4] and that as Jesus Christ himself first ordained it in his own simple and beautiful words, so is that purely scriptural form preserved among us, so that, agreeably to the apostle's own words, "as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we do show the Lord's death till he come."[5] Precious, yea, incalculably precious, is that death to us: nevertheless through our own stubbornness, and folly, and sin, we may render it of little worth to our selves individually. And if such be our infatuation, if such be our perverseness and hardness of heart; on what merit, and on what plea, can we rest our hopes of pardon and salvation hereafter? "Lord,"

[4] Church Catechism. [5] 1 Cor. xi. 26.

as said the then convinced and confiding apostle, "to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."[6]

If, my brethren, we wilfully and of set purpose turn away from any of the holy commandments delivered unto us, we turn away to our own hurt; and when our "time is at hand," when the hour of our departure approacheth, we may then in vain wish that we had kept more strictly to the precepts and the recommendations of the Gospel, and had not in so many indefensible instances, and on so many idle occasions, "left undone those things which we ought to have done."

Our Saviour in his divine foreknowledge knew to a moment when his "time was at hand," and he prepared himself—he left nothing undone, "He fulfilled all righteousness." And although the perfection of his all-seeing knowledge, and the matchless nature of his goodness, belong not to frail mortality, yet are we again

[6] John vi. 68.

and again bidden to prepare: "Be ye also ready,"[7] are his words to us; and the wise resolve of the psalmist ought to be our determination, "to make haste, and prolong not the time, to keep the commandments of the Lord."[8]

Let us, my brethren, at this solemn season of the christian year, when we are more particularly invited to approach and to contemplate Jesus dying on the cross for us men and for our salvation—let us give ourselves to the reading and the study of the singular and great love of our Master and only Saviour. Let us behold and examine his obedience unto death, and his hearty and persevering readiness to do all things pertaining to God, and the welfare of his friends: and "we are his friends," if we in honesty and integrity of purpose strive to do whatsoever he hath commanded us: and though imperfection will accompany and clog our best services, yet a willing obedience to his precepts,

[7] Luke xii. 40. [8] Ps. cxix. 60.

and stedfast faith in the merits of his most precious sufferings and death, shall avail us much in that awful hour which Jesus, in all the divinity of his eternal truth, so sublimely himself announced before his banded enemies—even that terrible and fearful time, when "the Son of man shall be seen sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven;" [9] when judgment shall be had upon all flesh; and the wide and unalterable distinction shall then be made "between the righteous and the wicked, between him who hath served God, and him who hath served him not." [1]

[9] Matt. xxvi. 64. [1] Mal. iii. 18.

SERMON VI.

CORNELIUS, THE ROMAN SOLDIER.

ACTS x. 22.

"Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God."

THE chapter, my brethren, which contains the history in which these words occur, ought to be read by us with deep attention, for the subject-matter highly concerns us on more than one momentous point.

Among the miraculous occurrences which marked the first preaching and establishment, and the early progress of the

Gospel, there are few incidents more worthy our admiration, or which more beautifully display the grace, the mercy, and truth of the Almighty, than the narrative here presented to our notice, and which forms so fit a subject for the consideration of military men.

This history, then, now before us is the very pleasing and instructive account of the conversion of Cornelius, a man and a soldier, specially approved and selected by the Almighty to be the first-fruits of that vast multitude of "all kindreds, nations, and languages," unto whom the Gospel was in "the fulness of time" to be freely offered, and among whom was to be preached for their acceptance the enlarged and Christian doctrine, "that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."[1]

It was indeed fitting, it was so ordained in the all-wise counsels of the Most High,

[1] Acts x. 34, 35.

that "the word of God," "the preaching of the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin," and the doctrine of salvation through Christ, should be first delivered to the Jewish nation. And the apostles, in accordance with their divine commission, did so begin at Jerusalem. But this having been done," the word of God having been first spoken to the Jews,"[2] and by them put away and rejected to their own irretrievable loss, the saving truths of the Gospel, the infinite extent of God's mercy and love in Christ towards all men; these tidings of great good were not to be henceforward confined within the narrow bounds of Judea. "God's ways were to be made known universally on the earth, his saving health among all nations."[3] It was to have free course and abound. And the prophetic word of Isaiah, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising,"[4] was to receive

[2] Acts xiii. 46. [3] Ps. lxvii. 2. [4] Isa. lx. 3.

its wonderful and glorious accomplishment.

To the furtherance of this great object of Almighty love, a special message, or invitation, was sent to St. Peter by the enlightened Cornelius; and at the same time it was divinely revealed to the apostle, that now the national distinction between Jew and Gentile was to cease—that from henceforth no man, however distant and separate his descent from the faithful and chosen Abraham, was to be "called common, or unclean;" that the men, who had been sent to call him to the house of Cornelius, were not to be refused; and that he, whose servants they were, had been graciously instructed from on high thus to send for him. Therefore, as we read, did St. Peter readily set himself to the work,—"he," as he was commanded, went with them, "doubting nothing." And this, brethren, as we say, this constitutes one of the interesting particulars of the chapter before us—that

thus it was that the Almighty was pleased to make manifest the counsels of his holy will, and to declare that "He would to the Gentiles also grant repentance unto life."[5]

Proceed we, however, now to note another particular belonging to this first preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, which may moreover worthily and profitably claim the lively attention of those who cannot but at once perceive that the distinguished man whose name is so honourably mentioned in our text, and on account of whose piety an apostle was especially sent to Cesarea, had devoted himself, and was engaged actively and usefully in the same military profession in which they themselves are enlisted. Surely, my brethren, our attention must be pleasingly awakened when we are told that Cornelius, of whom such worthy notice is here taken, was a soldier, a centurion, that is, an officer serving in the army of the

[5] Acts xi. 18.

Roman emperors, and, at the time of this history, employed on duty in one of the colonies, or rather one of the conquered provinces, of that extended empire. Your attention, my brethren, we say, may be profitably directed to the description here given of the life and conversation of Cornelius.

He was a soldier, and a soldier busily engaged in the duties of his profession: and yet the honourable testimony borne to his character was, that he was "a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

Ignorant and wicked is indeed the assertion that the military profession does, in its very nature and occupations, throw insuperable obstacles to the due and becoming exercise and practice of religion and virtue. It is a false and lying imagination to suppose that a soldier, be his rank high or low, must necessarily be a man careless and neglectful of the duties

of religion, and that he cannot, as other christian men, rightly and savingly observe and "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Gospel."

Take ye, however, my brethren, good heed how ye in any wise lay such a pleasing unction to your souls, or idly flatter and soothe your consciences with the excuse that this or that sin is not so heinous or punishable in you as in others, because of your profession; or, in other words, that your profession exposes you "to be tempted above that ye are able;"[6] and that consequently all will be well and peace at the last, for that the Lord will not be "extreme to mark in us what is done amiss." Had Cornelius thus given way to the temptations which did, and, we deny not, do more immediately belong to the military profession and calling,—had he lived as, unfortunately, is the manner of some modern soldiers, surely he had not been honoured and

[6] 1 Cor. x. 13.

rewarded with an especial and gracious message from heaven; and his name and character would not have become thus illustrious in the annals of Christianity.

We may safely affirm that Cornelius, whose praise is in the Gospel, did not spend his time in an idle or profligate manner; that his conversation was not a disgusting compound of ribaldry and profaneness, of wicked oaths and abominable language, or the mere idle utterance of "a fool after his folly." We may safely affirm, likewise, that his study and his delight were not the mere gratifications of selfishness, nor the mere indulgence of the animal appetites: for had he been a debauchee and profligate, or even an indolent and careless character, certainly he would not have been called "a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house." He was probably blessed with a family, and doubtless he took care that his children, and others with them, should be instructed to walk in the right

and honest paths of religion and sobriety. And from the estimation in which he was held, even by those over whom he had been put in authority; from the "good report," also, which he had from "all the nation of the Jews," we may perceive that in his public life and conduct, that in the discharge of his military duties, he was duly influenced by the principles of justice and humanity, of charity and good-will; that, in short, in the ordering of his conversation with the world, he did strictly and constantly endeavour to preserve always "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men."

And now for a moment, my brethren, consider the difference of this man's situation, and your own. The advantages and the opportunities are all in favour of the soldiers of the present day; especially, we venture to affirm, is the balance in favour of the soldiers of the British empire. We need not here speak of the violence, and rapine, and cruelty which

so generally characterised the habits, and the march of an army in the times of Cornelius. Neither is it among the least of the blessed effects of Christianity, that the preaching of the Gospel hath had a material tendency to lessen the horrors of war, to restrain the sword of indiscriminate slaughter, and to recommend and enforce the exercise of clemency and kindness, instead of insult and oppression towards a prostrate and supplicating foe.

A soldier under the Gospel, a soldier brought up in, and professing to hold to, the doctrines of the holy and righteous Saviour, is taught to know, that he, in common with all his fellow men, hath a soul to be saved; that he is, and will be, held accountable hereafter for all his deeds, and for all his words; and that as "God is no respecter of persons," so must he, as must all men who value their own eternal interests, unceasingly strive to

"keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right." [7]

The soldiers of England, we say, have not been left unreminded of those great duties, and of those solemn vows, which as Christians are binding on them, and which they must set themselves to fulfil. In the very articles of war, they are called upon and enjoined to fear, to reverence, and to worship the Lord their God. And that man hath very mistaken and very dishonourable notions concerning his military profession, who thinks he may indulge himself, and with impunity, in the odious practice of idle swearing, or the filthy custom of drunkenness: or if he mischievously flatter himself that either violence or debauchery, revengeful behaviour or opprobrious words, add manliness and weight to the character of the warrior, unto whom the weak and the unarmed look for support, and to whose fidelity and valour are

[7] Ps. xxxvii. 38.

entrusted the honour and the reputation of the empire.

These things, my brethren, even all the outrageous and forbidden "works of the flesh,"[8] ought not to be seen among, ought to be utterly detested and abhorred by you as much as by all other men. You call yourselves by the name,—you name, as the apostle expresses himself, "the name of Christ," therefore are you commanded, therefore are you bound by that all sacred name, to "depart from iniquity." And if ye refuse and rebel, if ye harden your hearts, and take pleasure in unrighteousness, why then, alas! you are throwing away your only lasting comfort, man's only sure stay and support, when sorrow and sickness shall have brought you down —and O! how quickly may that be the lot of the youngest amongst us—to the confines of the grave, to the valley of the shadow of death. Religion, my brethren, an habitual attention unto, and a cheerful

[8] Gal. v. 19.

fulfilment of its duties, is most necessary to a soldier; and because he of all men may be said to stand most constantly in the peril of death. His is the post of danger, and loyalty and courage belong not to him, if he "count his life dear unto him," whenever his military duty calls upon him to peril it. Therefore ought the soldier to be ever watchful and vigilant, ever on his guard against temptation, and against those sins which do the more strongly and easily beset his peculiar station and calling. The courage, the endurance, the loyalty of a soldier, is to be exercised not merely in the field, but also in the barrack, and when at liberty to rest and refresh himself after the duties of the day. The courage of a British soldier should be the courage of a Christian. And whilst he fears his God, and fears to do a bad action, or to utter a bad word, he is to gather up his moral strength, and bravely disregard the sneers and the ridicule, and, it may be,

the malicious opposition, of his foolish and more ignorant comrades.

Let not then, my brethren, the history and the example of Cornelius be lost upon any of us. Woe be to us, if, in the judgment, Cornelius "rise up and condemn us." For he with the little light he had, *he* was "a devout man, a just man, and one that feared God, and prayed to God alway." As ye, brethren, would in the judgment have the praise and the renown of Cornelius attach unto you, ye must follow now the noble example of his religious and virtuous conduct; ye must "go and do likewise." Enlisted by baptism into the service "of our Lord and of his Christ," ye must be faithful in that service, "faithful unto death."[9] And as ye are bound to fulfil the commands of your earthly sovereign, so be ye determined with true christian loyalty to fulfil the promise and the vow which the soldiers of Israel voluntarily and be-

[9] Rev. ii. 10.

comingly gave in reply to the exhortation of their commander, Joshua—"The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."[1]

[1] Joshua xxiv. 24.

SERMON VII.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

1 Sam. xvii. 45.

"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

These words form a part of that noble and undaunted reply which the gallant and youthful David gave to the proud boasting of the gigantic Goliath, when he, with blasphemous and insulting words, had stepped forth and challenged

to mortal combat any of the warriors of Israel. We read, however, that such a man was not then to be found in the royal camp. Either the strength of the Philistine was so well known, or his appearance was so formidable, that success in the attempt to overpower him was considered hopeless. When the man in all the pride of human might, and well furnished with earthly weapons, presented himself before the arrayed battalions of the Israelites, and haughtily uttered defiance against them and their king, "Saul and all Israel were dismayed and greatly afraid."[1] None was found bold enough to approach this strong armed man, and the army of the righteous cause continued panic-struck and powerless, quailing under the fierce look of their vaunting enemy, who thus hurled contempt and defiance at "the armies of the living God."

In this extremity, however, when fear was paralyzing the armed soldiery, and

[1] Verse 11.

confusion and rout were impending over the banners of the once victorious tribes, rescue and deliverance came from a quarter little expected. The stripling David, sent by his father with an inquiry and a supply of refreshment to his brothers, arrived at the camp at the very moment when the hostile forces had once again been set in battle-array against each other, and Israel was again to tremble and to flee before the face of their giant antagonist. But the challenge now repeated was heard by one, whose heart was at once warmed, and whose spirit immediately rose to repel the bravado and the insult thus cast upon his country, and his God. And David bravely questioned within himself, and with those around him, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"[2] Neither was this, the thought of David to pull down the haughty pride of the boastful heathen, the

[2] Ver. 26.

mere ebullition of a rash, though brave impetuosity. Stripling though he was, he knew, and had experienced that in other strength, beside his own, the battle was to be fought, and the victory won. Therefore to the mistaken and angry expostulation of Eliab, his eldest brother, he quietly submitted; and when brought soon after before Saul, he modestly replied to the questions of his sovereign by relating how he had opposed, and how he had prevailed against the lion and the bear, about to attack his father's sheep,—adding at the same time, and avouching his confidence, that the Almighty who had heretofore succoured him, would befriend and aid him still. "The Lord," said David, "that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." [3]

With what success the young man went out to the apparently unequal encoun-

[3] Ver. 37.

ter, how he met him, and overthrew him, and thereby vindicated the honour and the cause of God and his country, we have just now read in the service of the day.*

As presented to us in the simple language of the sacred historian, the narrative can scarcely be read without exciting a lively interest, both as regards the progress of the combat, and the issue of the event. Passing by the opening scene of this battle-ground, we will at once speak to the intrepid bearing and admirable conduct of Jesse's youngest son. For, my brethren, if courage and loyalty be dear to our hearts, if humility and faith be not unbecoming, we must feel greatly interested in the manner both of David's speaking, and of David's acting. David's courageous bearing was evidently of a higher stamp than that of mere animal courage. In David there was no insensibility to the danger; but he calmly looked the danger in the face, and looked also around him,

* The fifth Sunday after Trinity.

and within him for that succour and that help, without which the strength of the mightiest is but weakness, and nerveless to obtain the victory. The motives and the principles, in fact, which prompted to the line of thought and conduct which David here pursued, were truly in accordance with the dictates of a believing heart, of a heart humble and confiding in the overruling providence of God. Bold as might be the natural man, the youthful Israelite disdained not to look upward: and whilst he stretched out the arm of flesh to oppose and to strike down a bullying and blood-thirsty enemy, he piously trusted to the Lord God of Israel to bless that arm with victory. "Come," said the blaspheming Philistine, as the stripling approached to the mortal combat, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to

thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." His was the praiseworthy acknowledgment of the righteous believer; and whatever the scoffer and the wicked might affirm, the honest conviction of his heart was, "doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth."[5] At the same time we are to observe that David neglected not those human means, he despised not those weapons of warfare, which were in use in his day. And when the weight and the size of Saul's armour were found inconvenient, David contented himself with those more simple instruments which, as a shepherd lad, he was accustomed to carry, and to use. The brave and stripling warrior demanded not, he expected not, a striking miracle in his favour. He looked not for fire from the Lord to consume the adversary; neither did he demand that the ground should open to swallow up the vaunting and infidel giant. But he

[5] Ps. lviii. 10.

did look and seek for God's blessing on his righteous purpose to vindicate the cause of true religion. He considered himself simply as an instrument in God's hands to further on earth the knowledge and the fear of God. Therefore said he, in the strengthening spirit of confidence and prayer, "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee. —And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands." [6] And even so, and thus did it come to pass: the sling and the stone became mighty in the hands of the faithful and undaunted Israelite. The giant champion lay prostrate; his lofty looks were humbled in the dust, and his haughtiness was bowed down; and the Lord, "the God of the armies of Israel," was "exalted in that day."

Yes, brethren, that God's honour and

[6] Ver. 46, 47.

his holy name may be established and reverenced on earth, that his superintending providence may be recognised, and that a conviction of his goodness, justice, and power, may prevail to influence the heart—this, brethren, should be more and more in our hearts, to influence, and to regulate our actions. In the cultivation and practice of these righteous and holy principles, that they "may have free course and abound," we must never be slack. As they were abiding principles in the heart of the youthful Israelite, and enabled him to go forth and to conquer "in the name of the Lord of hosts;" so are they to be recommended unto, so ought they to be admired and adopted by the bravest spirits of the present day, even by those whose enlisted and bounden duty it is to fight the battles of their country, to be her safeguard and defence against every insulting enemy.

But, alas! brethren, on this subject what shall we say? In all truth and sober-

ness, and as the real state of the case is known unto God, what, alas! must the answer be? Sad indeed is it to reflect, that whilst there exists none occasion to impeach, or to suspect the personal courage of the British soldier, who is equally expert with the warriors of Israel, to use the weapons of his warfare skilfully;—pity, we say, it is, that David's example in other respects is not followed, that his humbleness of mind and piety of heart are not likewise adopted. David going forth to fight the Philistine knew full well that he was not less under the eye of the all-seeing God, than he was when tending "his father's sheep at Bethlehem."

Such, my brethren, is this incontrovertible truth; it is this restraining and wholesome recollection, which the more and the more it is cherished, so will it render the individual of any profession more and more distinguished, more useful to his country, more happy in him-

self. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."[7]

David was not ashamed to own that he put his trust in God. He was neither ashamed, nor afraid to refer the success of his undertakings to the all-wise and supreme decision of Heaven. The word of our God does indeed condemn the vain-glorious confidence, the carnal self-sufficiency, which would ascribe all to a perishing arm of flesh, and to that imperfect wisdom which, with all its searching, cannot indubitably find out "what shall be on the morrow?"

Nebuchadnezzar, for his arrogance and pride, and taking too much upon himself, was punished, as we know, in a very remarkable manner, and was thereby taught the holy lesson, and brought to make that right confession, which may well become the lips, and influence the plans of the wisest and most fortunate of the sons of men. "I Nebuchadnezzar lifted

[7] Prov. xiv. 34.

up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"[8]

"Sanctify, then, the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary."[9] Let the humility and piety, the patriotic devotion, and the calm courage of David, be yours, my brethren. These are graces and acquirements of an enduring character, and of an imperishable excellence; they shall challenge the respect even of your enemies; they shall procure for you the esteem

[8] Dan. iv. 34, 35. [9] Isa. viii. 13, 14.

and friendship of all good men; and what is of much more importance, they shall obtain for you the approbation and favour of your God. "For," as the Psalmist tell us, "the Lord loveth the thing which is right: he forsaketh not his that be godly, but they are preserved for ever."[1] O! remember we, that human strength, and bodily courage, and carnal wisdom, however now triumphant, and praised, and exalted, cannot of themselves set their possessors above the thousand accidents to which our flesh is heir, or free the guilty soul from the stings and horrors of an accusing conscience.

There is no station, or rank, or calling in life in which the Christian, if so be he knows anything of the doctrines of this Gospel, can feel himself independent of that all-pervading power and consummate knowledge, which extends even to the numbering of the very hairs of our

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 28.

head. And he, whatsoever his military rank may be, grossly mistakes the nature, the importance, and the end of a soldier's life, if he speak, or think, or act concerning it, as though the fear of God and obedience to the laws of the Gospel were not essential even to the present comfort of the military man, of the man who, from the very nature of his profession, is liable at any moment to be called upon to expose and to lay down his life in the discharge of his duty.

In short, the worth, and the instruction to be gained from this interesting history of David's combat with Goliath, consists mainly in the noble example therein set before us of piety joined with valour, of independence of mind and intrepidity of spirit coupled with an honest humility of heart, knowing how in all faith to refer the cause to God. David's heroic example will serve to show us that it is not the part either of valour or of wisdom to defy and to blaspheme, as did the giant

Philistine, the Lord God Almighty. But, alas! brethren, what do we, but approach unto similar depths of wickedness, if we give not the Lord "the honour due unto his name,"[2] if we trust to ourselves, or "take man for our defence, and in our hearts go out from the Lord?"[3] In all our ways and in all our doings, would we have a blessing thereon, we must do as David did. We must "go forth in the name and in the strength of the Lord God." The fitness, the propriety of that action must be more than doubtful, on which we cannot ask God's blessing. O! "consider" we well "the end," the account to be given hereafter of all the things done in the body; and surely we must see the reasonableness of regulating our conduct by the righteousness and holy love of our God and Saviour. And, however brave and excelling, and applauded by his fellow men, any one may be on

[2] Psa. xxix. 2.

[3] Commination Service. Jer. xvii. 5.

earth, yet are his prospects of eternity not enviable, and he hereafter may find himself but a miserable and despicable wretch, unless he hath arrived at the knowledge, and been living in the love of him, who is greatly to be feared,—even "the Lord sitting upon his throne." [4]

[4] 1 Kings xxii. 19.

SERMON VIII.

NOT TO CONSENT WITH SINNERS.

PROVERBS i. 10.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

IN this opening chapter of the book of Proverbs, and of several also of those which immediately follow, Solomon sets himself to advise and instruct in "words of truth and soberness," founded in experience, and expressed with surprising simplicity of eloquence. Herein does the royal writer beseech the attention of his hearers, and demand their cheerful compliance with his precepts, as being for their own real interest, for their present and everlasting benefit.

Professing to teach wisdom, to lay down a rule of life and manners, and to show how men may best secure to themselves honour, and respectability, and comfort, Solomon, as in the chapter of our text, peremptorily insists upon this great truth as the foundation of all virtuous action, that there can be no true wisdom, no right rule of conduct, unless the knowledge of God be attained, and the fear of God be in the heart; unless, that is, such a knowledge and such a fear be with us, as may deter from the commission of evil, and induce and determine to the practice of that which is good. "The fear of the Lord," saith he with solemn earnestness, "is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

It is the property of the foolish man, as also of the vain and presumptuous worldling, to make light of, if not to turn into ridicule, those words and that revelation which Almighty God, in compassion

to the benighted state of the human race, hath been pleased to bestow. Solomon, therefore, in the very outset of this book, entreats us to remember and to believe this great truth, to be well persuaded that without a reverential fear of the Supreme, without a wholesome and pervading sense of the irresistible power and unchangeable holiness of the Lord Jehovah, we can never hope to attain unto such knowledge or experience as shall be lastingly profitable to us. And he, doubtless, foresaw in the spirit of divine illumination, that unless faith was so established in the heart, the counsels of morality which he was proceeding to give, his wise precepts towards a life of virtue and usefulness, would fall but unheeded on the ear, would be forgotten as soon as uttered, even if they did not meet with worse treatment, that of scorn and ridicule.

Inasmuch, further, as youth is the seed-time of life, since youth is the season when

good or ill impressions are the more easily made and taken, the royal penman addresses himself first of all, and more particularly, to the young. He would have them, at their first entrance into the world, give heed unto the discipline and doctrine of religious wisdom, and the wholesome word of parental instruction. "My son," are his beautiful words, "hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother; for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." [1]

In so exhorting, however, in so counselling the young man to honour his parents, to follow their instructions, and to fulfil their wishes, this one thing is evidently supposed, that the parents themselves do not encourage, do not set in themselves an example of evil conduct, or of a despising and disregarding of the fear of God. As children are commanded,

[1] Prov. i. 8, 9.

on the one hand, to honour and obey their parents, so, on the other, it is the bounden duty of the parents "to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."[2] Shocking and disgusting is the sight or sound whenever this command is violated. And, yet, that it is never violated, is more than one dare affirm, is more than common experience will warrant one in asserting. It can scarce be denied that not only negligence and inattention to the moral and religious habits of the child may be laid to the charge of some parents, but that, in too many instances, a yet weightier sin may lie at their door, even the guilt of having set in their own persons an example of evil, and irreligion, and profligacy.

But it was not the purport of Solomon in this place to speak to, or to dwell upon the vile and unnatural wickedness of any such conduct. He is speaking more im-

[2] Eph. vi. 4.

mediately to enforce respect to parents as a general rule, and therefore makes not at the moment any exception, neither hints at the wickedness and unworthiness of the parents.

Having then established as a first principle the fear of the Lord;" having also inculcated the natural and grateful duty of filial obedience, that a son should honour his father; Solomon immediately proceeds to deliver the words of our text, and commences that very important subject which occupies the remaining portion of the chapter. His sentiments express the words of God who speaketh herein, and who demands of us that submissive attention and respect to his voice, which the intrinsic worth of his precepts so well merits. In truth, my brethren, we wrong the inspired eloquence of the royal writer, we sadly contract, and to our own loss, the comprehensive instruction of the wise preacher of Israel, if we confine these latter words of his first chapter

as addressed only to the young, and as conveying his reproof only on one vice in particular. The young undoubtedly, as not yet hardened in iniquity, as being not as yet grossly familiar with crime, are affectionately and earnestly admonished to beware of the insidious approach of evil allurements, to beware of the temptations and deceits of sin, to beware of the sophistry and lies of wicked men and seducers. Nevertheless, not the young only, but men of all ages and conditions, and the many who may yet be children in understanding, are here likewise addressed and most powerfully admonished. The voice of Solomon in our text speaks aloud to all, who are not utterly profligate, who are not yet absolutely lost to every feeling of virtue and religion, all such are here solemnly warned not to listen to the enticements of sin, not to be deceived by the plausible statements of the crafty and the wicked ones. " My son," is the brief but energetic language, " if sinners entice

thee, consent thou not." And there is much and urgent need that we all be persuaded readily and stedfastly to follow this most wholesome, this most valuable advice. For many and many, it may be said, are they of the sons of men who have been betrayed from the paths of virtue, and have gradually sunk deep into the mire of sensuality and crime, from the want of a little resolution to say No! when others were seeking to persuade them to be of their number in running into some folly, or into the commission of this or that evil thing.

Alas! for the weakness and the sinfulness of our nature, the picture which the royal writer sketches is strictly correct and true. These sinful men, against whom we are exhorted to be on our guard, and to stand firm, are represented as not content that they themselves are above the fear of God, and are apparently, and with good prospect of success, devising for themselves plausible schemes of worldly profit.

Satan-like, they are not content with this, but they are diligently seeking to persuade others to be as wicked as themselves: to the yet uninitiated in crime they offer riches, and pleasure, and impunity. "We shall find," say they, "all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." But whatever they may say, whatever they may offer, we are not to attend unto their hollow representations, for their words are but words of vanity and deceit. "My son, walk not thou in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil."[3] We are to read it as a certain truth, that if we join with them, if we hearken to their counsel, and follow their example, and participate in, and abet their evil deeds, we shall, like them, become sinners against our own souls. "They," we are told, "lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives."[4] We are, therefore, but making a thoughtless and ruinous com-

[3] Prov. i. 15, 16. [4] Ib. i. 18.

pact, when we enter into the views and give ourselves to take part in the lawless schemes of idle and ungodly men. It may well please them to draw us into their company, and to make us as much "the children of hell" as themselves; for thus do they obtain countenance in their evil deeds, and, strong in number, they dare to call their way prosperous, and are thus encouraged to break more and more atrociously the commandments of Heaven. But, says Solomon, "My son, walk not thou in the way with them." "Hear," and consider well, "the conclusion of the whole matter." For our yet further instruction the veil of futurity is, as it were, lifted up, and we are bidden to behold how it is that the profligate and scornful man layeth wait for his own blood, and lurketh privily for his own life.

In a grand and impassioned strain of eloquence Solomon proceeds to introduce the voice of God, personified as wisdom, calling aloud, and beseeching the "simple

ones" to open their eyes, and to become sensible of the fearful woe and horrible despair which shall one day be revealed, and multiplied upon the head of every hardened and impenitent sinner, every wilful and stubborn despiser of the righteous law of his God.

For a time, sinners may think, and they may say, that all things are safe, and that no harm is approaching. The exact reverse, however, is the real state of the case. A destruction is coming; and unrepented sin shall have its just recompense of reward. As writes the king of Israel in the chapter of our text, so did our Saviour speak, and so it is written in the Revelation, describing, for our warning and instruction, the terrors which shall in the end overwhelm the guilty, when the day of repentance, the day to amend, shall have passed away for ever. And, surely, men who are not altogether infidels, men who do not deny the possibility of a resurrection, and of a judgment to come, should not put away

from their thoughts the truths which they have been told, and which are written as with a sunbeam throughout the Bible, concerning a judgment to come. Surely it would be wise in men to make some provision against that day when the stoutest heart shall fail, and every worldly vanity, and every worldly thing, shall be consumed in the fearful burning. "O! consider this, then, ye that forget God;"[5] ye that live only unto idleness and pleasure, or in a yet more criminal round of licentiousness and evil. Think not in your folly that "to-morrow shall (always) be as this day, and yet more abundant." No! a day is approaching, which shall not be followed by a morrow either to you, or to the world. And O! if the face of your now insulted God and your now slighted Redeemer be then turned away from you, awake as you will then be to the awful realities of eternity,—what in that hour shall be your agony and your portion for ever?

[5] Psa. l. 22.

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."[6] "Hear now this, ye foolish people, and without understanding, which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not. Fear ye not me? saith the Lord."[7] Wherefore are ye, my brethren, more inclined to attend unto and to obey the evil example of others, the frivolous and worldly arguments of ungodly men, than gratefully to respond to the affectionate pleadings, the earnest counsel, and the powerful remonstrances of the Lord God Almighty? "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Though numbers may apparently be against you, though worldly hopes, and worldly influence may plead strongly in favour of joining those who live as though God

[6] Prov. i. 24—26. [7] Jer. v. 21, 22.

were not in all their thoughts, let nothing persuade you to be of their company. Be assured that God will in his own good time vindicate his own righteous cause, the cause of truth, of reason, and religion. Faction, and folly, and riot make a noise in the world, and worldly splendour and success do undoubtedly attract present and thoughtless admiration, but let not the meek spirited and the faithful be confounded thereat. God hath yet "left him seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."[8] And further, though we and all men should be apostates from truth, and christian righteousness, becoming utterly reprobate, yet, as said the Baptist unto certain of his hearers, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."[9] God's power and goodness shall not be impeached, though we may be so foolish, and so weak as to barter everlasting happiness for present pleasure, or rather for

[8] 1 Kings xix. 18. [9] Matt. iii. 9.

that which hath only the semblance, the mere name of pleasure, and is, in fact, anything but lasting satisfaction or true joy.

Nevertheless, how many venture to act thus! How many run this hazard, the hazard of incurring this irretrievable loss, on the most flimsy enticement, yielding to the slightest persuasion, and even against their own better judgment. Weak and inconsistent are we, and traitors to ourselves, thus tamely and cowardly to suffer ourselves to be despoiled of our good hope, and the answer of an approving conscience; thus basely and slavishly to submit to the trammels of sin, to be led the willing victims of folly and evil. But, "my son, walk not thou in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their paths."

Though the tide of evil may set strong, though "iniquity may abound," though "evil men and seducers may wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," yet still we are to maintain, and to do the works of faith and righteousness. We are

to give heed unto, and to be encouraged and strengthened, by these words of the Lord God, delivered by the pen of his prophet Isaiah. "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."[1] It is this hope, and this assurance, my brethren, that must be our stay and support in the hour of temptation, when our own corrupt inclinations, and the example and influence of others, may be persuading us to deem lightly of this or that transgression, or to account it but a small thing to neglect this or that commandment of the Lord. "Remember the end," as it is written. "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be

[1] Isa. li. 7, 8.

prolonged, yet surely, I know," said the wise man, "that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked."[2] Their riotous joy, their deceitful prosperity, their wordly impudence, shall be found perishable and worthless as stubble. "Their root shall be as rottenness."[3] "They shall not be able to stand in the judgment."[4]

Therefore, brethren, attend we to the warning, and let us be guided by the counsel contained in this first chapter of Solomon's writings. Remember, yea, let us all remember, that this counsel was penned under the guidance of the unerring Spirit of divine truth, and that Solomon's words consequently are worthy of all acceptation. Would we have the answer, would we possess the treasure, of a good conscience now, would we "inherit a blessing," would we arise hereafter unto "joy unspeakable and full of glory," we must

[2] Eccl. viii. 12. [3] Isa. v. 24. [4] Psa. i. 6.

obey the exhortation of our text, and when "sinners entice," we are to "consent not." For whatever plausible arguments, whatever smiling inducements they may offer; whatever glittering prospects of worldly gain, or worldly advantage and pleasure, may be set before us, we shall do well ever to remember, and frequently to question with ourselves, in the words of our Lord: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"[5]

[5] Mark viii. 36, 37.

SERMON IX.

THE YOUNG MAN VOID OF UNDERSTANDING.

PROVERBS vii. 7.

"I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding."

IT was, it is, the manifest design of Solomon, throughout the whole of his admirable writings, to impress upon our minds the necessity and the excellency of religion, the fear of the Lord, the true and saving knowledge of the Most Holy.

Wise and well judging as he was, conversant with all the sciences of his day, and amply provided with all the good, the pleasurable things of this life, Solomon yet knew that there was a knowledge most needful, without which all other knowledge

would be vain, yea rather, dangerous, and a snare. And this knowledge he designates by the name of "understanding, or wisdom;" and in more than one passage he tells us in what it consists,—what must be, and is, the essential thereof. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." And Solomon, with his accurate eye, and taught by sad experience, sees nothing but disgrace and pain, bitterness of spirit and unavailing regret, in any scheme of life, in any intellectual pursuit, which has not its foundation in "the fear of the Lord, and the knowledge of the Holy."[1] Speaking in this seventh chapter in the form of a parable, it is with regret he sees "among the youths a young man void of understanding." Nevertheless, the picture which Solomon here describes, is one which may too often be seen—a picture, a mode of life and conversation, which hath prevailed in the

[1] Prov. ix. 10.

world ever since our first parents, in their eagerness to become "wise," tasted and ate of the forbidden fruit, of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil."[2]

As youth is the season in which the habits and notions then acquired assume for the most part a marked character, and influence for good or evil the course of the after life, therefore does the royal writer of the book of Proverbs earnestly and repeatedly exhort the young to look unto the beginning of their ways, and to look forward unto, not to shut their eyes as to what may be the end: there being an "end bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword,"[3] even "the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."[4] But independent of that final end, and the judgment which shall be had upon all flesh, and upon all the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad, it is of importance, even as health, and prosperity, our good report, our

[2] Gen ii. 9. [3] Prov. v. 4. [4] Prov. vii. 27.

powers of usefulness, and our advancement in the world, are desirable things, that men should seek to increase in understanding as they increase in years. The lesson cannot be too soon acquired, that it is not good nor safe for a man to do only that which "is right in his own eyes;" that it will not answer to follow the solicitations of every foolish and sinful lust, the mad dictates of unbridled passion, the wayward inclinations of an undisciplined heart. The young man whom Solomon beheld walking on "void of understanding," was quickly enticed to do evil; he went "as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks."[5] He fell into the snare; and because his mind was not disciplined by "the fear of the Lord," neither did he regulate his conduct by the self-denying precepts of religious wisdom.

"Now, therefore," thus doth religion speak to us in the words of the wise king of

[5] Ver. 22.

Israel, "hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors! for whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."[6]

Wise, enterprising, and knowing as the age in which we live may call itself, yet is it needful that the men of this generation, yea, the men of our own enlightened country, be affectionately exhorted, lest they, with all their getting, and with all their advancement in worldly knowledge, and with all their wonderful progress in scientific information, get above that knowledge of themselves, of their own natural condition, and of man's immortal destiny, of which if they lose sight, to them must belong the reproof from the

[6] Prov. viii. 34—36.

Lord,—"Thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me."[7]

It was, as we may recollect, the patriot desire of the prophet leader of the armies of Israel, that his countrymen should be renowned throughout the earth as "a wise and understanding people;"[8] and their title to this honourable distinction was to be established in their observance of, and obedience unto, the statutes and ordinances of the Lord their God. Let us, indeed, my brethren, be timely persuaded, that it is no mark of understanding to be ignorant of, or to scorn the fulfilment of those duties which are prescribed to us on the authority of God, and which are to be read in God's sacred word. It is neither wisdom nor understanding to neglect the study of that holy book, from which are to be gathered the riches of heavenly wisdom, and which, instead of

[7] Isa. xlvii. 10. [8] Deut. iv. 6.

increasing our self-vanity, and nourishing our pride, will teach us to "cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."[9] For, after all, what does man know? Extensive as may be, and is, his grasp of knowledge, yet shall there still be something for him to acquire: and the longest life shall not suffice to satisfy the cravings of an immortal spirit, or the most laudable thirst for information. "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place? Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command?"[1]

[9] 2 Cor. x. 5. [1] Job xxxviii. 1, &c.

Before these and other great questions, matchless in the dignity of their language, and powerful in their eloquence, Job was constrained to humble himself—to acknowledge the worm-like nature of man—his insignificance in strength, in knowledge, and in discernment, as compared with the dealings of Omnipotence, and the counsels of Eternity. And in like manner it is required of us that we submit ourselves to the words and the teachings of Infinite Intelligence and unsearchable Power. So shall we happily be making advances towards the right understanding of ourselves, and of our own obligations and duties.

In truth, it is a painful thing to witness the little progress the generality of men are inclined to make in that understanding which, in the scriptural sense of the word, is the only true wisdom: "The fear of the Lord," as we read in Job, "that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding."[2] Man may in-

[2] Job xxviii. 28.

deed be wise, and wise not only in his own sight, but also in the judgment of the world; nevertheless, unless he is "wise as to that which is good," wise in the government of himself, of his own wayward passions and corrupt inclinations,—wise in the practice of the laws of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness,—his wisdom and his talents will scarcely afford proof of his possessing a truly wise and christian heart, "right towards God." And the mere worldly wise man may, to his own everlasting ruin, be the willing and infatuated prey to "many foolish and hurtful lusts."

Let us then, my brethren, be on our guard, lest we mistake either the beginning, or the end of knowledge. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good:"[3] but that knowledge must be sought for, and acquired from, and in subservience to, the written oracles of Divine truth. It must be based in that

[3] Prov. xix. 2.

wisdom which Solomon so justly extols, and which is nothing else than an acquaintance with the Divine rules, and the moral maxims of pure and vital religion, and of which, pre-eminently, Christ Jesus is "the Author and Finisher." We say, an acquaintance—but we mean thereby, not a mere superficial acquaintance—not a mere cold verbal assent to the general beauty and loveliness of God's holy precepts, but that we take such an interest therein as shall lead to a diligent cultivation and practice, a fruitfulness, an abounding in every good word and work, "an adorning of the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."[4]

Thus is it that the spectacle deprecated by Solomon in our text, "a young man void of understanding," may happily not so often be found among us: although, whilst antichrist is yet abroad in the world,[5] there will be those, alas! who walk "according to the course of this

[4] Tit. ii. 10. [5] 1 John iv. 3.

world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit," as St. Paul writes, "that now worketh in the children of disobedience: who have their conversation in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh."[6]

Nevertheless, we would speak even to all,—to the stripling as well as to the young man,—to the yet elder in years, and to those who may as yet not have entertained any pious, or abiding thoughts concerning man's truest wisdom, and what shall best befriend him in the hour which, to the wise, as well as to the foolish, must alike come—the hour of perishing nature—not to be put off by the strongest exertion of human wit, or the brightest display of worldly talent. In that hour, even the hour of awakening up into eternity, great shall be the profiting and great the praise of "the wisdom which is from above;"[7] the wisdom and the knowledge whereby man is taught

[6] Eph. ii. 2, 3. [7] James iii. 17.

"to depart from evil," and "to do his duty in that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call him."[8] The treasures of that wisdom, and of that understanding, shall neither fail, nor deceive. They can make the honest poor man richer than the titled slave of sinful pride and lustful passion. He will be rich; he hath treasure in heaven; and because he is a religious man; because he fears God, and fears to do a bad action; and because, finally, instructed in the faith of the Gospel, he takes to himself, and is influenced by the word of promise, which saith, "Blessed are they which do his (Christ's) commandments, that they (through HIM) may have right to the tree of life."[9]

[8] Church Catechism. [9] Rev. xxii. 14.

SERMON X.

THE GUILT OF SWEARING.

MATTHEW v. 34.

"But I say unto you, Swear not at all."

THE words here read, however brief their expression of the will of the Almighty, do at the same time positively and strongly prohibit a practice, which the commonest observation will surely tell us is glaringly frequent, and lamentably rife in our streets. And yet, my brethren, whose are these words? who uttered this restraining command? who hath said, "Swear not at all"? You scarcely need be told, that these are the very words, that this is a positive injunction of Christ,

our rightful Lord, the appointed Judge of all men, and who, in reference to the solemn proceeding of the judgment-day, hath declared, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."[1] Fearful, then, must be, and is the infatuation, and great the folly of those who fly in the face of a command issued on such Divine authority, and who disregard a prohibition, the infraction of which will be sorely visited hereafter. Nevertheless, the violation of this precept is too notorious, the sound of profane and idle oaths is too frequently heard among us, to render it a matter of question whether or no there be any occasion for the ministers of the Gospel to lift up their voices against this heinous sin. There is but too much need for the appointed watchmen of the christian sheepfold to "be instant" in this matter—to remember, and to follow the injunction from the Lord to Isaiah, "Cry aloud,

[1] Matt. xii. 37.

spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins."[2]

Suffer then, brethren, the word of admonition on the sinful practice so emphatically prohibited in the words of our text. Happy they whose consciences, awakened and alive to the deadliness of the sin, can, without subterfuge, give them "an answer of peace." It is indeed lamentable, and a proof of the weakness of man's nature, that the evil against which we are now to speak, the sin of idle and profane swearing, is a sin in itself utterly profitless and vain, a sin for the commission of which it would be difficult to frame any one excuse. The very excuses brought forward in extenuation carry in themselves their own refutation: they do, in fact, aggravate the guilt, displaying either a very criminal thoughtlessness on sacred subjects, or a lamentable want of self-government, or a very ignorant fool-

[2] Isa. lviii. 1.

hardiness on a point of obedience, which does so intimately concern the respect and honour belonging to the name, and the word of the Lord Jehovah. For we may not flatter ourselves that we do not infringe on the prohibition of "Swear not at all!"—we must not think that the third commandment is not violated, so long as we refrain from making mention of the name of God. Certainly in the third commandment we are expressly told, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." But Jesus Christ, who came not only to fulfil the law, but to expound, to explain, and to show its spirit, hath, in his admirable sermon on the mount, taught us to extend the meaning, or principle of this commandment, as forbidding all manner, and every species of idle, rash, and vain swearing, such as was common in those days, and such as, alas! to the disgrace of a christian nation, is but too common in these present days:—"I say unto

you," are the words of our blessed Lord, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil."[3]

It would appear that the Jews had accustomed themselves to many improper, many superfluous, and vain affirmations; and that they were wont to make foolish and frivolous distinctions as to the relative weight or importance to be attached unto them. But forcibly and pointedly did our Saviour expose, and denounce the absurdity as well as the error of any such unauthorized explanation. "Woe unto you," said he, speaking of the Scribes and Pharisees, "ye blind guides, which

[3] Matt. v. 34—37.

say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon."[4]

Thus sweeping and comprehensive was Christ's condemnation of the slightest approach to the rash and hasty introduction of God's holy name, or of other sacred and hallowed expressions in our

[4] Matt. xxiii. 16—22.

daily and our ordinary conversation. Our conversation is to be "Yea, yea; nay, nay." It is to be conducted and ordered in simplicity, and meekness of spirit, without anger, without heat, without intemperance, and without guile. Nevertheless, so habituated are some men to the vile and unchristian custom of making such asseverations, that in their coolest moments, unmoved by passion, and unroused by resentment, God, and heaven, and hell, and the curse, and the imprecation, proceed from their lips to the annoyance and disgust of the sober-minded, and to the peril of those who thus perpetually and daringly disregard the solemn injunction, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."[5] But little can these "sinners against their own souls," who thus wantonly give themselves unto cursing, and a profane manner of speaking,—little can they have thought on the solemn and heavy judgment pronounced—

[5] Exod. xx. 7.

and it was originally pronounced audibly by the Almighty himself—against all such evil utterance of the tongue. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Read attentively, my brethren, the ten commandments, and you will find none more solemnly enforced, or the breach of which is more solemnly condemned. You will find not the least warrant to suppose that this command can be held in less account than any of the rest. To break, therefore, this commandment, and to allege in excuse that it was a mere act of thoughtlessness, or that it is an idle habit not involving much evil, or that you, at least, intended no harm,—what alas! is this, but to increase the offence by thinking to apologise for, and excuse one fault in confessing yourself guilty of another.

You must not be so thoughtless. It is a crime in you, not to break through and give up a habit which you affirm of

your own mouth to be not free either from objection, or blame. And to say that you intend no harm, what is this but an idle mockery, an affront to the supreme majesty of Him, who, by the teaching of his Holy Spirit, has said, "Be not rash with thy mouth."[6] Men have no right to be thus careless in a matter, whereon God hath solemnly declared his holy will and pleasure. "Ye shall not," so is the commandment repeated in Leviticus, "swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord."[7] "I am the Lord," ever present to note and to mark down all the transactions, and all the words of the children of men. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment."[8] And it is a vain and indefensible thing to assert that no harm is intended by the many (we will grant unmeaning) oaths, the innumerable idle

[6] Eccles. v. 2. [7] Lev. xix. 12. [8] Matt. xii. 36.

profanations, which are hourly heard among us.

Nothing which relates to God, nothing which refers to another world, nothing which concerns the health and purity of our souls, can be of little consequence. On such points we must intend either good or evil. And whether good is intended when men curse, and consign to perdition either their own souls or limbs, or those of their comrades—judge ye! And is it no harm, think ye, to appeal unto Heaven upon every frivolous occasion? Is it no harm to call upon your God, and upon your Saviour, in the guilty hastiness of the moment, without knowing what you are about?

But perhaps you allege that you intend no harm. Harm however there is, even present harm, and evil is made to abound. The quarrel is thereby not unfrequently provoked; the heat of anger is thereby increased; and malevolence is thereby added to what was per-

haps at first only passing anger. And men do thus impiously take unto themselves the power and attributes of the Deity. They speak, and they denounce, and they curse, even as though the "power to cast both soul and body into hell" were a prerogative which belonged unto them, and not to God only. But the Almighty has never delegated such power unto men, and we are to be well convinced that for every such assumption of his authority we shall have to answer. The Psalmist declares concerning such, "His delight was in cursing, and it shall happen unto him: he loved not blessing, therefore shall it be far from him. He clothed himself with cursing, like as with a raiment, and it shall come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones."[9] The Almighty will not allow the created thing, the creature of dust and ashes, to wield, according to its own intemperate and foolish will, the thunderbolt of his

[9] Psalm cix. 16, 17.

high wrath. "It is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."[1]

Away, then, with the plea of thoughtlessness or inattention as excusing the heinous guilt of idle or profane swearing. It is a crime of too crimson a dye to admit of such a palliation. Neither may we think to allege as admissible in the judgment of the great day, that the angry word, or the violent behaviour of others provoked, and prevailed against us to be "partakers with them in their sin." Brethren, there is "utterly a fault" in this matter; and it is a strictly prohibited thing in Christians to render "railing for railing."

Men of themselves involuntarily bear testimony that it is wrong. And the most habituated swearers, however frequent their idle blasphemies, give proof at times that this fearful practice, apparently inveterate, can be restrained, and is to be conquered, and, as it were, without effort.

[1] Rom. xii. 19.

We allude to the meekness, the demureness, or quietness of speech (call it by what name you please) which is observable when the man is speaking to, or in the presence of, his superiors, his "masters after the flesh:" then there will be no cursing or swearing, there will be lowliness in deportment, and modesty in language; and yet in a moment afterwards the same awe-struck individual will turn, perhaps, to some helpless inferior, and heap on him a profusion of oaths and execrations fit only for the mouth of a demon, characteristic of one accursed of God, and abhorred of man.

Great indeed is the inconsistency, and monstrous the guilt, into which men, otherwise of good character, and not without education, and ability and judgment, can suffer themselves to be betrayed. And although no one good feeling is gratified, although no one angry emotion is thereby appeased, but is the rather aggravated; yet do men

"make a mock at this sin," and they will go on in despite of the most solemn warnings, as if it had never been said, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Can, however, such men venture to call themselves Christians? Can they believe there is such a thing as "a judgment to come?" Can they believe that truth pervades every page of the written word of God? Sad is the reflection, that men professing the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall be found so to set at nought the solemn and plain command of "Swear not at all," of the extensive bearings of which our Lord has not left us in ignorance!

Nevertheless the habit is with some men so inveterate; and so fool-hardy will some be in thinking, or even in asserting, that it is scarcely of sufficient importance to be mentioned as a crime, that probably what hath been here said will have little weight: and thus alas! it may be, that

this pernicious, this vile and ungodly practice of vain and rash swearing will still retain its mad and self-destroying abettors. Nevertheless the preacher, according to his duty and ability,—and may the imperfection and brevity of his argument not be utterly void!—hath endeavoured to declare the counsel of God concerning this sin, a sin which among seamen and soldiers is so fearfully common. Common, however, as it may be, and freely indulged in by the men of both professions; yet the general prevalence of an evil can never make that lawful, which God hath positively forbidden, and which he hath by his own mouth solemnly denounced as criminal.

If, brethren, God hath declared, that "he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," thousands or even millions of evil-minded and thoughtless men shall not be able by their obstinacy to turn the truth of the word of God into a lie, or to "alter that which

hath gone forth from his lips." Be ye then, my brethren, and each of you individually, well convinced and persuaded that the habit of idle, or of passionate swearing is no less unprofitable and unmanly, than it is disgraceful to the character of a Christian, and exposed to that wrath which shall eventually visit to punish every unrepented sin. Idle or profane swearing will not satisfy your hunger, it will not obtain you the esteem or the friendship of any one good man, neither will it advance you in your profession. But it may, and will, make God your enemy; and you may, by persisting in this abominable and inexcusable practice, be heaping evil on your own head. You will be "treasuring up unto yourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."[2]

Well, indeed, and aptly hath the pious author of the book of Ecclesiasticus

[2] Rom. ii. 5.

exposed the evil of this vice; and his words may here, in conclusion, be perhaps not without profit, cited as giving us good "instruction in righteousness." "Accustom not thy mouth to swearing; neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One. For as a servant that is continually beaten shall not be without a blue mark, so he that sweareth and nameth God continually shall not be faultless."[3]

[3] Ecclus. xxiii. 9, 10.

SERMON XI.

OUR SAVIOUR'S FIRST MIRACLE IN CANA OF GALILEE.

JOHN ii. 11.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

THE miracle of which these words form the concluding observation is, as indeed are all the other wonderful and mighty acts of our Saviour, worthy our best attention; and by a careful consideration of the narrative we shall, with God's blessing, happily arrive at a right understanding of those principles of benevolence and cheerfulness which belong to the Gospel of Christ, and the practice of which is not

inconsistent with that self-denial and discipline of the heart and affections, which they must cultivate who would be "Christ's disciples indeed."

In the miracle wrought at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, we are well instructed, my brethren, that the religion of Jesus Christ, that faith in him, that obedience to his precepts, involve not of necessity any unnatural austerities, any mere bodily mortifications; as if such outward acts could of themselves supply the want of inward purity, the absence of that vigilance over ourselves, whereby the soul is nurtured in righteousness and true holiness.

It were manifestly a fearful act of blasphemy to impute sin in any way unto Christ, or that he could in the smallest degree countenance it in others, or lend his divine and miraculous aid on any occasion wherein the glory of God and the good of man were not to be immediately, and ultimately also, promoted.

We venture, therefore, at once to say, that the festal meeting at Cana in Galilee, which the blessed Jesus honoured with his presence, was not contrary to the high and holy purpose for which he had come into the world, and had condescended to be "made in the likeness of men." The evangelist expressly tells us that by this remarkable display of divine power, Jesus "manifested forth his glory," and the immediate and blessed effect was, that "his disciples believed on him." Their faith was confirmed. They beheld in him power, and good will to attend unto, and to satisfy all the reasonable wants of frail mortality.

Is it not then a subject of the deepest regret that men should so often and so wantonly convert to an ill use the bounteous gifts of a gracious and beneficent Providence, that they should turn a blessing into a curse, and allow that, which was given unto them "for their wealth" and pleasure, to "be unto them an occa-

sion of falling."[1] This it is that we shall do well to remember, as often as we read the account of the miracle of water turned into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. We should do well constantly to bear in mind that it is the abuse, the perversion, of God's good gifts to man which is condemned, and so peremptorily forbidden, in the Bible, and not the moderate and lawful enjoyment of them. On this point we may read, and with immediate reference to the miracle under consideration, the words of the writer of the book of Ecclesiasticus, who says, "Wine measurably drunk and in season bringeth gladness of the heart, and cheerfulness of the mind; but wine drunken with excess maketh bitterness of mind, with brawling and quarrelling." And is not this latter description a too sad and too true picture, my brethren, of what so frequently occurs among yourselves; and wherein ye so often give melancholy proof

[1] Psalm lxix. 23.

of your own weakness, and folly, and infatuation, suffering yourselves to be tempted to your own hurt, and thereby involving yourselves in sad disgrace, and in much trouble? Unfortunately you are not, you will not be, content to enjoy yourselves in moderation. Too many of you hasten to, and snatch at the wine-cup, fully determined to drink to the uttermost of your strength, nay, even beyond your strength: and soon do ye present yourselves a lamentable spectacle of filthy intoxication, disgusting and loathsome in the extreme. The vice of drunkenness, the passion to indulge in strong liquors, is indeed too glaringly prevalent among certain classes of men not to demand the severest censure, not to excite much pity in the charitable breast for the madness of those who thus, deaf to every kind counsel, and spurning at every wholesome restraint, do voluntarily degrade themselves to a level with the very hog that walloweth in the mire. The evils, indeed, of

being thus madly given to immoderate drink, are manifold. The drunkard, in his madness and folly, brings upon himself destruction both of body and soul. He is depriving himself of a good reputation; he is injuring his health; he is wasting his strength; he is squandering his worldly substance; he is hasting unto poverty. And, besides incurring all these temporal judgments, he is sinning against his own soul, and shutting himself out from happiness hereafter: for "drunkards," we are told in the volume of Christ's holy law, "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." O! my brethren, be persuaded to consider that this is no idle declamation. Drunkards, and liars, and thieves, and the profane, and the despisers of God's word, are alike under the same condemnation of woe and misery hereafter. They are doers of evil, they are workers of iniquity, and "the face of the Lord shall be against them." Remember this then, and tremble for the judgment to come, if

ye will not be persuaded to renounce your filthy appetite for strong drink by the frequent sight and experience of the trouble and punishment, even in this world, into which that man plunges himself who habitually inflames or stupifies his senses with intoxicating liquor. Strongly doth St. Paul speak in condemnation of those, the men of depraved lusts and appetites, "whose God," saith he, "is their belly, whose glory is in their shame."[2] It is, alas! too true, that the "mighty to drink wine" shall be found to glory in their strength, which is then their shame and their bane, tempting them to challenge others to like feats of profligate daring. But the word of the Lord by his prophet denounces "woe" unto such, unto "men of strength to mingle strong drink." "As the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they

[2] Phil. iii. 19.

have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."[3] From these and such like sentences of holy writ, we can come to none other conclusion, than that the man addicted to strong drink shall not escape harmless and unpunished either in this life, or in the next; that it is, in short, a degrading and a ruinous habit; and however the vitiated taste may for a moment be gratified," at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."[4] Therefore, brethren, as ye would not be disappointed of your christian hope, as ye would—as it is required of you, to "walk worthy the vocation wherewith ye are called,"[5] at once abjure this sin which doth so easily beset some among you, and walk ye honestly and soberly in the sight of God and man: for, "surely, I know," saith the wise preacher, "that it shall be

[3] Isa. v. 22—24. [4] Prov. xxiii. 32.
[5] Ephes. iv. 1.

well with them that fear God, which fear before him."

Indeed, my brethren, as we are earnestly and affectionately entreated by St. Paul; and as we are exhorted by Christ himself to let our light shine for good before men; and as we are freely permitted to use and to enjoy the gracious bounties of our almighty Father,—"it remaineth, that we use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."[6]

Sociability and friendly communication, good nature and good humour, are principles to be cultivated, are feelings not to be condemned. They are recommended in the Gospel; for by them the sorrows and the trials, and much of the labour and fatigue incident to the flesh, are alleviated. Only we must be careful not to transgress; we must "be sober," and we must "be vigilant," so that neither our relaxations nor our pleasures and enjoyments dege-

[6] 1 Cor. vii. 31.

nerate into sin by our exceeding those bounds of moderation which befit the rational man, and the due exercise of those faculties, and of that experience and reflection and knowledge, which the Almighty hath bestowed upon us, the creatures of his love and his bounty.

And, further, we may observe, that as on the occasion which gave rise to the miracle in Cana of Galilee, Jesus with his disciples had been called, had been invited, so ought we to desire, and to make it our endeavour, that nothing in our scenes of joy and congratulation and pleasure occur contrary to the word and the example of Jesus, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, or to the advice and directions of the apostles of our Lord. "Let your moderation," as we are enjoined in the epistles, "be known unto all men." "Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus

Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." [7]

The divine and holy Saviour, the example and the fulfiller of "all righteousness," doth not now visibly walk on earth, neither doth he now audibly or personally work his miracles of beneficence and joyfulness; but we live "to the praise of his glory," "his glory is manifest," his praise is advanced among men; whilst by the righteousness of our lives, by the purity of our conversation, and by our orderly conduct, we show and manifest to the world, that the ways of Christ's Gospel "are ways of pleasantness," and that cheerfulness doth of right belong to "a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men."

If, my brethren, we duly remember, if we can find comfort in the thought, that in all our employments, and in all our pleasures, Jesus in his Spirit is ever present with us, surely we shall be watch-

[7] Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

ful, that our occupations and our relaxations from the severer cares of life offend not him, nor transgress that "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free;" but that they be according to the word and the commandment which teaches us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."[8] When the apostle, as in the epistle to the Romans, exhorts us to "be not conformed to this world," his evident intention was to guard us against a sinful conformity, the following, as we may say, "a multitude to do evil." Would we, my brethren, avoid sin, would we receive and enjoy with grateful hearts the many gifts and blessings which a gracious Providence places before us, we must accustom ourselves to weigh well our actions, and to consider the nature and the tendency of our pleasures and enjoyments, trying them in the balance of almighty truth, and according to that

[8] Titus ii. 12.

written word which hath been given for "a light unto our paths." So shall we not be perplexed by groundless scruples on the one hand, nor tempted to overleap the bounds of prudence on the other under the specious plea of good fellowship, or the plausible excuse that there can be no harm in occasional mirth and recreation. Undoubtedly joyousness of heart, or a social meeting, is not to be forbidden, so long as the christian graces and duties of temperance and of moderation, and a christian fear of transgression, be conscientiously observed. But better will it be for us wholly to abstain; better will it be for us religiously to abhor and renounce even the taste of "that which maketh glad the heart of man," and altogether keep far away and for ever from the social board, than in the smallest degree to offend, or to cause others to offend, by running into the guilty excesses of riot and dissipation. There is harm, there is danger, and guilt, and con-

demnation, for all those who are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," who are not disposed to, and will not, deny to themselves any one worldly indulgence, any one gratification, which their sensual and selfish hearts may covet and desire. Our chiefest meat and drink, our highest pleasure, our strongest and unwearied desire, ought to be to do the will of God, to "walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing;" to "abhor that which is evil, to cleave to that which is good;" in short, so to live, so to work, so to enjoy ourselves, so "to order our conversation aright," that we may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things;" and, in "simplicity and godly sincerity," prove to the edification of others, and to our own everlasting peace, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." [2]

[2] Rom. xiv. 17.

SERMON XII.

THE EVILS OF DRUNKENNESS.

PROVERBS xxiii. 29—32.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine, when it is red, when it giveth his colours in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

IN these words of the wise and experienced Solomon there is a subject recommended to our attention, of manifest and great importance to the present peace and welfare of many in this congregation. And the answer, which the royal writer himself gives to the questioning read in the first verse of the text, no one can

possibly deny. It were well, therefore, if the advice which follows were better remembered, so remembered as to be carried out into practice. Notwithstanding, however, the absolute truth and certainty belonging to this statement; notwithstanding the acknowledged troubles, discomfort, and pain, which daily await and overtake the drunkard in his sin; yet how lamentably frequent is the sight, how constant the recurrence of those scenes, to which allusion is made in the former part of our text! Quarrels and contentions, provoking words, profligate language, and blasphemous expressions, are among the common, the daily results of that vile and abominable excess in liquor, which is so universally condemned in Holy Scripture. Neither are the evil effects of immoderate drink confined to the sins committed by the tongue. Wounds and bruises, a diseased body, a debilitated constitution, are sooner or later the sure consequences attending that

vicious habit against which the Preacher of Israel here lifts up his voice. Most truly doth he affirm, concerning it, "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." It is, moreover, a vice totally unprofitable; nay, it is a vice destructive alike to the bodies and to the souls of men; and condemned alike by laws human and divine. And whilst we are told, on authority indisputable, that "the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty," [2] we find "drunkards" enumerated by the apostle among those sinners, those outcasts from happiness eternal, who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." [2]

If a man be desirous of ruining his prospects in the world, if he seek to get himself an ill name, if he be ambitious of the title of a worthless character, certainly he can take no surer step thereto than by frequenting those houses, and joining those parties, where sobriety is

[1] Prov. xxiii. 21. [2] 1 Cor. vi. 10.

deemed a folly, and to be "mighty to drink wine" is applauded with the name of being a good fellow. Nevertheless, this pernicious habit of indulging in intoxicating liquors is a "sin which doth so easily beset" certain individuals, and we may say, men of certain professions, that, as we are now addressing a military congregation, a word on the subject may not be accounted untimely, or out of place. Happy they, whose consciences can in this matter give them "an answer of peace!" and they, in all christian charity, will join the preacher in devout and earnest prayer that their less sober companions may have grace to recover themselves from the deadly snare into which they have fallen, ere that ruin be upon them, even that woe to the uttermost, which is the decreed portion of those, who will so recklessly and inordinately "follow strong drink." [3]

There is, in fact, no one sin which doth

[3] Isa. v. 11.

so easily beset"[4] very many men of the military profession, than the vice of drinking to excess; there is none which doth more involve the soldier in trouble and disgrace. No respectable soldier, indeed, can for one moment think, or argue, that there is either profit or credit to be derived from an unbridled and wanton use of intoxicating liquors; although, if the truth be spoken, there is perhaps no vice more frequent in the barrack, or its neighbourhood; and no one crime for which soldiers are more frequently punished than for the beastly and degrading vice of drunkenness. We have only to look at the entries in a regimental court-martial book, and this statement will be fully confirmed. It will be seen that drunkenness, and drunkenness alone, is the cause of so many defaulters being recorded; the cause likewise of men neglecting their duty, of being found unfit to fulfil the orders they have received

[4] Heb. xii. 1.

when on guard, or on parade. An outrageous love of liquor may in truth be said to be the source of every evil in a soldier. It is an absorbing, and a ruinous habit, yea, it is a consuming fire, and brings many a promising youth to a premature state of debility, cutting him off in the very prime of manhood.

This, my brethren, is no gratuitous, or vain assertion. Walk through the wards of a military hospital, and you may see one man weak and imbecile as a child, restless at the same time, and burning under the torturing influence of a raging fever: go a little farther, and you may see another patient wasted to a skeleton, and fast sinking into the grave; and you shall, on inquiry, be told that in either case the constitution is shattered irrecoverably, that there is scarcely a hope of life; and this—because a habit of drinking immoderately having been contracted, and persisted in, the springs of life have been totally destroyed. Alas! that it should

be so: and that men should thus become their own self-destroyers, should thus wantonly blight their prospects in this world, and tinge with the deepest gloom and uncertainty the most charitable anticipations of what shall be to them hereafter!

Sad indeed, and melancholy, is it to behold the bounteous gifts, the kind permission, the liberal indulgence, granted by our most merciful Creator, so frequently perverted and abused to the hateful purposes of gross sensuality and abominable sin. The gracious providence of our Almighty Benefactor affords to us, or, as the Psalmist expresses it, bringeth "food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man."[5] Therefore we conclude, that, as a refreshment, wine may be lawfully used and safely enjoyed in reason, that is, in moderation. "Wine," as writes the son of Sirach, "measurably drunk, and in season, bringeth gladness of heart and cheerfulness of the mind;

[5] Psalm civ. 15.

but wine drunken with excess maketh bitterness of the mind, with brawling and quarrelling. Drunkenness increaseth the rage of a fool till he offend; it diminisheth strength, and maketh wounds."[6] Better indeed would it be, more wise and profitable, that a man should abstain wholly from any, the most allowable indulgence, than that he should, through a culpable want of self-government, convert that indulgence into an occasion for "sin to lie at the door." Nevertheless, thus it too frequently happens with respect to the indulgence of which we are now speaking, and from being overcome by which we would earnestly persuade men. But there are, alas! those who will not be content with a moderate and reasonable refreshment; there are among us men who will go on and "add drunkenness to thirst," depraving, and debasing themselves more and more in body and in mind, until they become almost loathsome to themselves,

[6] Ecclus. xxxi. 28—30.

and are objects at once of disgust and pity to their compassionating neighbours.

Watchful, then, and vigilant, ought we to be, my brethren, lest a love of liquor obtain the mastery over us, lest a habit, so surely and so fatally ruinous, imperceptibly steal over us. "At the last it shall bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder." Instances are not uncommon of men, who originally took their glass merely out of a feeling of good fellowship, and who then prolonged and repeated the indulgence, simply because they had not sufficient resolution to say no! reducing themselves at length to shameless and complete sots, and seeking, one might say almost of necessity, to steady their shattered nerves and trembling hands by a renewed and daily application to the slow, but sure murdering wine-cup. Look not, then, brethren, at the wine. "Watch and pray" against this temptation, this "sin which doth so easily beset" the pathway of many, who, but

for this one weakness, might have long continued useful, and died respected and honoured, in their generation. For, brethren, take this as a certain truth, that as ye would prosper in life, as ye would rise in your profession, as ye would be in good report among your equals and superiors, ye must have, and maintain a character for sobriety. It is utterly impossible that any profit, any gain or advantage, can in the long-run belong to drunkenness. It is notorious, with respect to the naval or military services, that a man, otherwise good, is not promoted, does not obtain this or that situation, because he has the character of a man given to liquor, because he is known to be addicted to this foul propensity. If indeed in kindness, and in hope of better conduct for the future, he be raised ; how often, and how soon again shall he involve himself in trouble, and be reduced, with an added mark of bad conduct against his name ! And so the deplorable end cometh,

Poverty and disgrace, disease and death, shall close the miserable scene; and the only epitaph that charity can write on his tomb is, that he was nobody's enemy but his own.

This, pitiable however as it is, is the more favourable side of the picture. For drunkenness can scarcely be said to content itself with the self-slaughter of its foolish and blinded victim. Drunkenness, we are told, "increaseth the rage of a fool, till he offend." Daily observation will certify to us that it is the cause of much positive evil to the neighbourhood, and to the community in general. How many, for instance, are the mad and disgraceful riots to which drunkenness gives rise! how frequent the noisy and senseless disputes which occur under the baneful excitement of wine! how daring, moreover, and shocking, the blasphemous utterances, how dreadful the oaths heard amidst the brawlings and vociferations of the drunkard! And further—how

deaf, how obstinate against the voice of reason and persuasion, is the drunkard in his fearful hour of maddening intoxication! He will not listen to advice. He is reckless of all consequences. And though his own, or his dearest friends' interests be at stake, although even his own life may be placed in jeopardy, yet will the infuriated man take his own headlong course, until his senses are completely overcome; and he lies on the ground wallowing, and helpless, transformed, as it were, from a man into something lower than a brute beast which perisheth.

But besides the eventual misery and wretchedness, besides the disgrace and ruin, which attach to the case of the individual drunkard; besides the guilt and the sin which the besotted victim himself incurs; we are to be reminded that they also shall not be without sin, that they "walk uncharitably" towards their neighbour, who do in any way entice or encourage their weaker brethren to the

hazard and the sin of drinking to excess. "Woe unto him," as the Lord declared by his prophet, "that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also!"[5] Yes! however strong the head may be to bear the unnatural excitement, however fearlessly, and with apparent impunity, a frequent and prolonged indulgence in the vice may be committed by any man, yet shall not that man stand acquitted, yet shall he be accounted guilty; because, proud in his own strength, he hath set an evil example to others; because others, less strong, may have thereby been tempted, and persuaded into sin. And doth such an one, tempting and ruining others, and eventually destroying himself, call himself a Christian? Doth he lay claim to the privileges and promises of a Gospel, which "teacheth us to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world?"[6] Surely a lie is in his mouth;

[5] Hab. ii. 15. [6] Tit. ii. 12.

certainly he neither remembereth, nor knoweth that "every one that nameth the name of Christ," is by that very name bound to "depart from iniquity."[7] Where, brethren, is our charity for each other?—where our love for those souls, for whose redemption Christ died, if we, in our wantonness, or pride of heart—if we, presuming on the health and strength granted us, "cause our brother to offend?" The charitable rule which St. Paul laid down for himself, may especially be commended to our observation in regard to our conduct in the world, and with respect to our social meetings. "All things," said this zealous and right discerning apostle, "are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."[8] We are therefore to be circumspect and prudent in our conduct, not only as it affects our-

[7] 2 Tim. ii. 19. [8] 1 Cor. x. 23, 24.

selves individually, but as it may influence others. As far as lies in our power, we are "not to suffer sin upon our neighbour."[9] And, as St. James writes, "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."[1] Ah! how different are these words from the thoughtless, the guilty invitation, "Come, and let us take our fill of wine; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant!"[2] O! what a recklessness, what a forgetfulness of the future is there in these latter words! How surely shall that imagination turn to evil! How truly may it be affirmed, that "the end of mirth, so caused, is heaviness."[3] Therefore, although we may by constitution be "mighty to drink wine," yet for our own sakes, and for the sake of our comrades and neighbours, we must be prudently

[9] Levit. xix. 17.
[1] James v. 20.
[2] Isaiah lvi. 12.
[3] Prov. xiv. 13.

restrained by the advice, "Shew not thy valiantness in wine, for wine hath destroyed many."[4] There is, brethren, shame, there is woe denounced against all such abetters in, and workers of iniquity. "Therefore," and this is the word which hath come forth from the Lord, "as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."[5]

"The countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil."[6] And whilst neither respectability, nor riches, nor honour,—whilst no one present advantage can be named as rewarding the infatuated votary of the intoxicating cup, there is condemnation, there is woe to the uttermost, written against the vice of drunkenness in the sacred and instructive pages of

[4] Ecclus. xxxi. 25. [5] Isa. v. 24. [6] Ps. xxxiv. 16.

God's revealed truth. Perilous indeed is the state of the soul of the habitual drunkard. And what can be the hope of the wretched individual who perisheth in his intoxication? What the situation of him, who, having deprived himself of all outward consciousness, passes in that state of insensibility from time into eternity; and awakes no more, until the arch-angel's trumpet summons him to judgment! "O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"[7]

Judgment and eternity, my brethren, hasten on, though we may be forgetful of those all-important things, though we may be greedy and mad after every sensual indulgence, and abuse the good creatures of a bountiful and gracious Providence to sad occasions of falling. Remember, brethren, further, that in the judgment of the great day, unto which we must all rise after the deep sleep of

[7] Deut. xxxii. 29.

the grave, the plea of ignorance in regard either to the folly or the sinfulness of this habit will not avail Christian men. Ye know the truth in this matter. As already observed, daily experience, and the commonest observation, will suffice to declare the disgraceful misfortunes into which the man, addicted to immoderate drink, suffers himself to be led. "He goeth, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."[8] And think ye further, brethren, as ye stand arraigned at Christ's dread tribunal, at the tribunal of him, who hath said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy;" think ye that, in excuse for having thus enervated and destroyed your health and strength, it will then avail you to plead that you have not wronged your neighbour in this matter, that in the course

[8] Prov. vii. 22, 23.

of your drunken folly you have only marred your own worldly prospects? However christian charity may breathe a fervent prayer over the bed of the dying profligate—and christian hope is not to be denied to the returning prodigal even at the eleventh hour — yet, brethren, living men, men yet abroad in the world, and with their faculties of mind and body yet vigorous, and who, perhaps, may be glorying in their strength, and abusing it to purposes of occasional, if not habitual, excess—all such men are to be again and again solemnly reminded, that "drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Their sin is enumerated among those "works of the flesh," which conduct to the mansions of a too late repentance and unavailing remorse.

Therefore, brethren, and in conclusion, we bid you to "consider the end." Be persuaded, that what hath been here said, hath been delivered for your own indi-

vidual good. "Get wisdom" in this matter. "Get understanding" as to the present profit, and the everlasting gain of sobriety. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man."[9] And if ye will not hear, if ye will not hearken unto this counsel from the Lord, if ye will not receive this promise of Holy Writ to follow and to lay hold of it—then shall the shame and the ruin be on your own heads. "Thou shalt mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed;[1] and when there remaineth, if sense and reflection do then remain, "but a fearful looking for of judgment."[2]

In a word, and with reference to this, and to all the practical advice which a minister of the Gospel may at any time deem it needful to give from his appointed place, he, who now addresses you, may be allowed to adopt the peremp-

[9] Prov. iii. 4. [1] Prov. v. 11.
[2] Heb. x. 27.

tory language of the wise Preacher of Israel, and to say to you collectively and individually, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."[3]

[3] Prov. ix. 12.

SERMON XIII.

THE GUILT OF LYING.

ACTS v. 5.

"And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came upon all them that heard these things.'

THE judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira, the history of their instantaneous deaths under the word of an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, forms a remarkable object, and stands out an awfully interesting record in the early history of the Christian church. And the account, as handed down to us by the sacred writer, is sufficiently plain and distinct for us to understand why they were thus publicly smitten,

why they were, without any further warning, visited from the Lord with the signal punishment of death. Their crime indeed was of no light or trivial character. It was complicated in its nature, and most vile in its origin. And the Lord thought fit, at the outset of the preaching of his Gospel, and in the infancy of his visible church, thus miraculously and awfully to step forth to avenge the insult offered to the faith, and to show and to declare in the sight of all men how dangerous and deadly a thing it was, and would ever be, for men professing to accept and believe in his Gospel to "tempt the Spirit of the Lord."

Whilst the number of believers was few, and they an isolated and proscribed sect, we read, as in the preceding chapter, "that as many as were possessed of land or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and distri-

bution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Upon this charitable fund Ananias and his wife cast an evil eye of covetousness, and they sought to take a wicked advantage of this state of things which, from the necessities consequent on the peculiar situation of the infant church, had then existence among the brethren.

They, it is evident, consulted together to carry out this work of deceit; agreeing to sell their worldly possessions, whether house or land it matters not, and to bring a part only into the christian treasury, as common stock to be appropriated for the use of the poorer brethren. At the same time, and herein lay the guilt and the fraud, they were to offer that part as if it were the whole. Thus they sought to make profit from the common purse, to acquire the reputation of having given up all for the sake of Christ; whilst, in fact, they did retain and enjoy in secret the hoard of money which should still remain

theirs: and this base scheme was to be effected by the utterance of, and persisting in, a wilful and deliberate lie.

It may be that in their hearts they were disbelievers in the great truths which they had heard, and to which, outwardly at least, they professed to assent. They could scarcely have thought of, neither in their hearts have acknowledged, the mighty power of God, which was then working with the apostles "by miracles and signs and wonders." Perhaps, moreover, a fearful spirit of temerity was in them, and, independent of the gain to accrue from the deceit which they planned, they daringly thought to tempt,—to prove, that is, the skill and discernment of the apostles, whether, or no, these eloquent and distinguished men were worthily entitled to the respect paid to them, and qualified for the trust reposed in them. In whatever degree, however, any such feelings had place in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, the inspiration, and consequent

authority of the apostles, was soon to be established, and too late were they to become aware, that power and knowledge superhuman had been bestowed and rested with these delegated ministers of the Lord Jesus. For no sooner was their scant and fraudful offering of worldly covetousness presented before the apostles, than Ananias heard himself, and only too justly, accused of having given way to the evil suggestions of the devil, of having schemed to deceive the Holy Spirit of illumination and truth.

And this the wickedness of Ananias was the more aggravated and without excuse, inasmuch as there was not the least compulsion as to the sale, or to the disposal of the money made by the sale of his possessions. "Whilst it remained unsold it was his own, and after it was sold it was in his own power."[1] His, therefore, was a deliberate and inexcusable act of knavery and cunning, of deceit and

[1] Acts v. 4.

lying. And because his wife consented thereto, because she agreed herself to forward and to maintain this vile imposture, this unrighteous work, therefore did she involve herself in the like awful sentence of condemnation. "Behold," said St. Peter to Sapphira, "the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." Thus did she and her husband "perish from among the congregation."[2] Thus were they judicially and on the instant stricken with death. No space was then given, no opportunity was then afforded, to these miserable and convicted creatures to cry unto the Lord for mercy and forgiveness. In the greatness of their crime were they taken away. In the foulness of their offence, and with the forbidden and guilt-stained speech on their tongue, were they hurried away to their last and dread account.

That "great fear should come upon

[2] Deut. xvi. 33.

the church, and upon as many as heard these things," can surely be no matter of surprise to us. Here, in the sight of the assembled multitude, was wrought a miracle indeed, but unlike the many and beneficent miracles recorded in the Gospel; here was an astounding work of condemnation,—"The wicked driven away in his wickedness."[3] No wonder, as we repeat, that "great fear should come upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." It was thus fully certified to the believers in Christ, that the Spirit of the Lord was especially present with his church, to uphold, and to vindicate, the cause of truth and righteousness. And even among those whose hearts had not been yet awakened, and turned by the preaching of the Gospel, great must have been their astonishment, and troubled their thoughts, that such a judgment should be impending over those who, having professed themselves followers of the cru-

[3] Prov. xiv. 32.

cified Jesus, should thus stoop to the mean arts of falsehood and deceit.

It is our duty, my brethren, as of other Scripture narratives, so of this fearful example, to make a right and profitable use, and so to gather instruction therefrom, that the words of our mouth, and even the thoughts of our heart, may be duly influenced thereby. The principal and holy lesson indeed to be deduced from, and proved by, the instantaneous and awful death here inflicted upon Ananias and Sapphira, is the truth of Solomon's assertion, that "a lying tongue is but for a moment."[4]

A certain principle, or, as we may say, a sort of tacit compact which is called honour among men, may, and does, especially amongst the higher classes of society, prevent the commission, or utterance of the grosser falsehoods; and so far as this feeling operates in a moral and peaceable way, so far as the confidence and good order of society is thereby preserved, it is

[4] Prov. xii. 19.

well, it is good and salutary in its way. But, my brethren, we, the instructed servants of the Gospel,—we are required to "speak truth every one with his neighbour,"[5] on a far more exalted principle than mere worldly considerations, or out of regard only to what may be our character in the world.

Truth, my brethren, is an attribute of the Lord God Almighty himself. "A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."[6] "Lying lips must be an abomination to the Lord,"[7] The father of lies is the devil, and it was by a lie, by equivocation, and cunning, and deceitful promises, that he prevailed to the destruction of our first parents, bringing upon them and their hapless posterity the just anger and wrath of an insulted God.

Far from holiness, therefore, and in secret league with the great enemy of souls, may that man be said to be, who lends his mouth to the utterance, or

[5] Eph. iv. 25. [6] Deut. xxxii. 4. [7] Prov. xii. 22.

furtherance of falsehood, who deceives his fellow man in what proceeds from his lips, who wickedly disdains to confine himself simply to what is true, but does unhesitatingly speak that which is most convenient, or agreeable and plausible, and apparently best for himself at the moment.

Can our consciences on this point, my brethren, give us "an answer of peace?" It may be surmised that if we suffered our consciences to speak truly and searchingly in this matter, many, even in this assembly, could scarcely feel at peace. For in the common utterances of the tongue, and in the ordinary intercourses of society, there is too much guilty forgetfulness of the high and holy duty of "speaking the truth from the heart, of using no deceit with one's neighbour." But under whatever form, or under whatever pretence, the truth is concealed, whether by a direct falsehood, or by equivocation, that coward species of lying, or by mental reservation, or by any other mode; "sin lieth at the

door," so often as we thus deviate from the straightforward path of christian honesty and plain dealing. Called upon even as we are in our every-day conversation with the world to speak the truth, a lie is not to be defended. It is against the holy and positive law of the most high God to say that which is not true, even though it be to save oneself from blame or punishment, or even to screen a comrade or a friend. In the latter case we may be said to add unto our fault, becoming thereby partakers in other men's sins; and evidently proving that we had rather let "iniquity abound," and wickedness go on unreproved and unchecked, than observe and give that unbiassed testimony to the truth, which the laws of God and man alike prescribe, and by which alone the bonds of social order, of public security, and private confidence between man and man, can be preserved and strengthened. And not to run into the prolonged detail of the many

ways in which the simple rules of "speaking the truth," and of acting truly, may be violated, it may be sufficient to observe, that whenever we act, or speak otherwise than we would have others act, or speak towards us under like circumstances, we are guilty not only of infringing upon, and breaking the social compact, but are likewise guilty of forgetfulness of God's all-searching knowledge, and do in effect despise and make slight of that word from on high, which prescribes truth in all our words, and uprightness in all our actions; which hath said, "He that speaketh lies shall perish."[8] And be it further and particularly noted, that every time in the which we design to deceive or defraud our neighbour, thinking to obtain some worldly profit, some praise, some gain, some temporal advantage thereby, we do every such time make a fearful approach to that sin, in the actual commission of which Ananias and Sapphira were struck with

[8] Prov. xix. 9.

death. The alteration of times, and the more prosperous circumstances (as to worldly matters) of the Christian Church, render it improbable that we can now ever fall into the actual sin, and the deadly presumption of so tempting, as did this wretched couple, "the Spirit of the Lord." Nevertheless we may and do "tempt the Spirit of the Lord," as often as we commit sin, lie and swear and defraud, cheat and deceive, trusting for our security and success to the ignorance or the easiness, the blindness or indolence of our fellow creatures; forgetting, as we are told in Ecclesiasticus, "that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun, beholding all the ways of men, and considering the most secret parts."[9]

Destruction, indeed, may not come upon us so swift and instantaneous, as did the lightning vengeance of the Lord upon the guilty heads of Ananias and Sapphira; yet, brethren, remember we, that there is

[9] Eccles. xxiii. 19.

a record, an imperishable record kept, and a book written, which no man can blot or falsify, and wherein is noted and preserved every idle and wicked word spoken, every lying affirmation, and every utterance of the tongue which hesitates not at the attempt to deceive. Therefore, though the lover and speaker of a lie, and the coward practiser of the equivocating word, may escape detection and disgrace in this world, yet what hath he whereof to boast? And where is his security against the day when the secrets of the heart shall be laid open in the presence of his once deluded fellow creatures—in the presence of men and angels? Surely his guilt shall then be made manifest: he shall not then escape, neither shall his fault be any longer hid, or go unpunished. For in the great and coming day of judgment, "God," as we are most credibly certified, "shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."[1] O how

[1] Eccles. xii. 14.

solemn and awful are these words! and how awakening ought to be the consideration—the consideration and reflection that "there is nothing secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known, and come abroad!"[2] Our fellow men we may oft times and successfully deceive; but besides men of imperfect vision and understanding like ourselves, we have, my brethren, to do with a God "unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid;" and therefore, however, with apparent ease and present safe result, we may practise deceit and fraud, equivocation and lying in the world, God we cannot deceive; and he hath made known to us his determination of making "manifest even the counsels of the heart," and of "rendering to every man" according to his words, and "according to his works."

This is the great and profitable truth

[2] Luke viii. 17.

propounded to us in the history of Ananias and Sapphira: and let us rightly meditate thereon, so that we may duly and practically be impressed with the value and importance of maintaining and speaking the truth at all times and on all occasions. Let an honourable frankness, a godly simplicity, and a perfect sincerity, govern and regulate the utterances of our lips. "Let your communication," said our Saviour, in his teaching, "be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil." [3]

Let us abhor to say the thing that is not: let us avoid and put away from us every species of deceit, the remotest approach to fraud and double dealing with our tongue. Although a world could be gained thereby, though for the term of our life impunity from the just consequences of crime should thereby be obtained; yea, although riches and pleasures and luxury and rank should thereby be

[3] Matt. v. 37.

at our command; let us "consider the end," let us remember that into the holy and blessed habitations above, "eternal in the heavens," shall in no wise enter any thing that "defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."[4]

[4] Rev. xxi. 27.

SERMON XIV.

ON DISHONESTY.

EXODUS xx. 15.

"Thou shalt not steal."

THE ten commandments, originally delivered from mount Sinai, were made known to the people with all those awful tokens of the presence of the Deity, which were so well calculated to strike awe into the hearts of the assembled multitude, and to impress upon their minds the infinite importance of the words which were then audibly uttered. We read, that "the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai," amidst "thunder and lightnings,

and earthquake, and that the voice of the trumpet was exceeding loud, so that all the people that was in the camp trembled!"[1] And unlike the manner in which the judicial and ceremonial law was made known, through the instrumentality, that is, of Moses, the ten commandments were delivered by the Almighty himself audibly in the hearing of the people—"God spake all these words."[2] The people heard, and feared greatly. And so hearing, they could not fail to understand the importance of what they had thus heard, and that it was their required duty seriously to fulfil all the words of this law. It could evidently be no light or indifferent matter whether they were obedient or not: and that they had already come to that just conclusion, that they had pledged themselves to be obedient unto God's words, we read in their previous answer to Moses, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."[3]

[1] Exod. xix. 16. [2] Exod. ii. 1. [3] Exod. xix. 8.

It is thus, my brethren, whenever we turn our thoughts to the consideration of any one of these ten commandments, that we are to perceive the weight and importance which ought to be attached to them—to commandments thus awfully and solemnly issued. And these are the self-same words, the same holy precepts, which, with strict propriety and admirable wisdom, the christian fathers of our church have appointed to be distinctly and repeatedly rehearsed in the hearing of our public congregations, so that even the lowest and most ignorant among us may be clearly advertised, and become acquainted with, those great points of duty which belong either to the honour and service of God, or to the general welfare, the good order and quiet of the community among whom his lot is cast.

Whilst the first four of these ten commandments refer to the duty we owe unto God, the last six distinctly teach what is due from one man to another, even

honesty and loving-kindness, truth, justice, and equity, in all our dealings. The care and the pains taken by our Lord, not only to impress upon the minds of his disciples the duty and necessity of honouring, worshipping, and serving God, as being "the first and great commandment," but also particularly to explain and to enforce the precepts of the second table, clearly point out to us the scrupulous strictness, and the conscientious attention which we should give to the keeping of the last six commandments, the fulfilment of our duty towards our neighbour, even "to love him as ourselves."[4] In more than one instance did our Saviour declare the keeping of the law of the second table an indispensable essential towards the attainment of eternal life. To one who asked of Him that good and hopeful way, the reply was thus emphatic though brief—"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments:" and being asked for a further explanation of "which?" Jesus said,

[4] Church Catechism.

Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."[5]

To call ourselves Christians, and yet to live in the habitual neglect of any one of these commandments, must be not only a contradiction, but also a dangerous mode of living; for, as St. James writes, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."[6]

Nevertheless, brethren, how is this with ourselves? Are we all, generally speaking, attentive to keep and to observe "the whole law," the precepts of the ten commandments, as they are to be spiritually received by us, and brought into practice under the teaching of Christ and his apostles? Brethren, let us examine ourselves strictly in this matter, and "that not lightly, and after the

[5] Matt. xix. 17—19. [6] James ii. 10.

manner of dissemblers with God;" recollecting, further, that these laws, as delivered to us in the Gospel, extend even to the thought and disposition of the heart, to that source whence the first inclination to do this evil or wrong against one's brother originally springs.

Whilst, therefore, and to come to the more immediate consideration of the commandment, the words of which have been prefixed as our text, we are positively forbidden to steal, we are also, be it remembered, forbidden to covet, "not to covet nor desire other men's goods."[7] On the breach of this eighth commandment, and of the guilt of which there can be no doubt, we propose now to say a word; premising that when this eighth commandment is violated among a description of men, such as are here assembled,*—there is, in addition to the moral guilt, no little cowardice and treachery,

[7] Church Catechism.

* Preached to a regiment in a barrack square.

alike dishonourable to the profession, and destructive of all brotherly confidence.

That the crime of theft should be committed by men, that is, among soldiers, who, together with their other duties, are called upon to watch over the public property of their country, and the private property of others, whose office also it is to preserve the general quietness, peace, and well-being of society,—that any such men should ever be found themselves violating the laws of justice and honesty, is a sad and melancholy proof of the proneness of men to devise, and to commit iniquity. Such men, however, are guilty of aggravated crime. For them the extenuating excuse cannot in reason be urged, that they were impelled by importunate want and unavoidable distress. For all the needful, necessary, and proper things, as well for their bodily sustenance as for their clothing, have been provided for them. And if they through carelessness destroy

or wilfully make away with their necessaries, that in itself is a crime, and is doubled by seeking in any way to wrong another, in order that means may be found to supply the deficiency.

Righteously, then, do the laws of our country denounce as amenable to punishment the pilferer and the robber, even those who keep not "their hands from picking and stealing." They are enacted to vindicate and to maintain the word of God, and to enforce the prohibitions of the Gospel. The law of God is in our text peremptory, "Thou shalt not steal." Thou shalt not defraud "thy neighbour, nor rob him."[8] And St. Paul to the Ephesians writes, "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good."[9] Dishonesty cannot be excused under any circumstances: that which belongeth to another, we may not take without his permission. The small-

[8] Lev. xix. 13. [9] Eph. iv. 28.

ness of the thing taken, and though the thing might possibly not be missed, nor wanted, matters not. It is not ours, and we may not without sin take it to ourselves.

If we once allow ourselves to trespass in little matters, the time may not be far distant when we shall be able, and without remorse, to commit more heinous acts of dishonesty and fraud. "He," as we are told, "that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little."[1] And the boy, for instance, who begins by pilfering at home, or with cheating his fellows at play, is not unlikely to grow up into the experienced thief, the armed robber, and the midnight marauder. Against such, however, we are on the watch, and the terrors of the law are in force,—dangers beset them in the very attempt. But the villany and the cowardice and the baseness of thieving are combined, when a man turns his hand against his comrade, perhaps his confiding friend; when he takes and pilfers not only what belongs to another, but when

[1] Ecclus. xix. 1.

that other unsuspecting individual lives perhaps under the same roof, and eats perhaps at the same table; and advantage is taken of his temporary absence, possibly on duty; and his little property, sacred and valuable to him, is, with the most unchristian treachery, ransacked and pillaged. O! it is base and vile, it is an unmanly and a dastardly thing, for a man thus to wrong his neighbour, to take advantage of his comrade's confidence, and to betray and violate the security which one soldier should ever have on the honesty and honour of another. Surely, contempt and scorn shall eventually fall on the head of the pilfering scoundrel; and the curse also of God shall surely await him. For "know ye not," as the apostle demands, "that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" and among whom are included "thieves, and covetous men, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners."[2] "Woe unto him,"

[2] 1 Cor. vi. 10.

saith the prophet, "that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chamber by wrong!"[3] "A poor man that oppresseth the poor, is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food."[4] It is, we repeat, theft and deceit, cruelty and baseness, combined. There has been one general and sufficiently clear rule laid down, in regard to what constitutes a breach of the eighth commandment, and to which it were well if men would conscientiously attend, namely, that that cannot be honestly taken, which we would not take, if the owner were present, and strong enough to resist our attempt. And again, false and abominable is the plea, that because we have been defrauded and wronged by others, therefore we may retrieve our own individual loss by stretching forth our hands, and helping ourselves from the property of our neighbours. Were this the admitted practice, soon would this world be despoiled even of its present portion of tranquillity and happiness; and its inhabitants would soon

[3] Jer. xxii. 13. [4] Prov. xxviii. 3.

become "wild men, their hands against every man, and every man's hand against them."[5]

No, my brethren, the Almighty in his goodness and wisdom hath ordained it otherwise. As he hath himself issued the command, "Thou shalt not steal," so are certain laws of society framed with reference thereto; and dishonesty, fraud, and cheating, and theft are punishable wherever, and as often as, the crime can be brought home to the individual offender. He also, be it recollected, who knowingly connives at the theft of another, who, although he may not have been an actual participator, yet does not his utmost to prevent the commission of the crime, or afterwards wilfully holds back from bringing the offence to light, is so far to be accounted as involved in the guilt. "When thou sawest a thief," saith God, reproving in the 50th Psalm, "thou consentedst unto him." Countenance and impunity are thereby given to

[5] Gen. xvi. 12.

a positive act of wickedness, and numbers become enlisted in the guilty pursuit of unlawful gain. To be cowardly and backward in doing one's duty, not to stand up for the right, not to prevent the wrong, not to bear testimony in vindication of the oppressed, is to disgrace the name and the character of a christian man, of a trustworthy and diligent soldier. The actual thief, or the sneaking pilferer, has already forfeited those honourable titles which belong to the profession of arms. He has voluntarily incurred suspicion, and trouble must needs be his portion. And surely that life cannot be an enviable one, against which the finger of warning is pointed, and the eye of distrust directed. And though a once convicted thief or pilferer may repent, and come to a better mind, though he may happily be reclaimed from the evil of his way, yet many years must elapse, ere the foul stigma shall be wiped away from his character.

As therefore, my brethren, ye would

live in credit and respectability, as ye would enjoy with a clear conscience that with which God has blessed you, as ye would be accounted worthy of higher trust and confidence, "keep your hands" from the remotest tendency to pilfering and stealing. "Do violence" to no man's property, "and be content with your wages."[6] This, you may recollect, was the precept of John the Baptist to the soldiers of his day: and be it your care to attend unto, and obey the injunction. Depend upon it, that in the long-run you will find even your worldly welfare and prosperity best promoted by a stedfast adherence to the christian principles of honesty and fair dealing in all things. "All things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." And with respect to this eighth commandment, conscientiously and impartially put yourselves in the situation of the other man, whose property may be

[6] Luke iii. 14.

in your power, and if you would be unwilling to part with, or to lose your own, touch not, to deprive him of, the smallest thing which belongs to him.

As soldiers, let honour forbid it; as reasonable men, let your sense of common justice forbid it; as Christians, let the word of God keep you from every such crime. "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man," remembering well the end, and the account hereafter, as it is added, in conclusion of the foregoing scriptural advice, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."[7]

[7] Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

SERMON XV.

THE GUILT OF COVETOUSNESS.

ROMANS xiii. 9.

"Thou shalt not covet."

THE apostle, in enumerating, as in the chapter of our text, the commandments of the law as the rule and principle of the christian life, appears to lay peculiar emphasis on this, the concluding precept of those righteous and holy words, which the Almighty was pleased himself to deliver audibly from Mount Sinai amidst the reverential attention of the whole congregation of Israel. And in truth these words, "Thou shalt not covet," brief as they are,

and simple, yet are they full of instruction, and well calculated in their honest observance to realize that "peace on earth, and goodwill," which was proclaimed from, and sung in heaven, as essentially belonging to the birth and manifestation of Jesus Christ. In this, the great excellency and surpassing worth of the Gospel of Christ are to be gratefully acknowledged: for not only do we find therein the sure hope and promise of "glory and honour and immortality" in the realms beyond the grave; but the conditions imposed upon us now, the duties now enjoined for our observance, the precepts and the advice now given, are beautifully and eminently calculated to advance our present comfort, to keep sin and sorrow away from our dwellings, and to make this life, even this vale of uncertainty, of clouds and sunshine, a foretaste of the happiness which shall hereafter be the portion of those who, under Divine grace, become "wise as to

that which is good, and simple concerning evil."[1]

When, my brethren, we are commanded "not to covet," we are solemnly warned and told where to place the first stop, how to conquer those unquiet appetites, those insidious wishes, which are, alas! now to be found, more or less, in the breast of every man born into the world. And these shall work with increasing and deadly effect—these shall from small beginnings prevail to the destruction of man's "peace on earth," and of his hopes in heaven, unless they be nipped in the bud, unless they be opposed and put down by the principle herein inculcated, and enforced on authority undeniable, "Thou shalt not covet." "Keep thy heart," saith the wise preacher of Israel, "with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."[2] There, brethren, even there, must the watch be set; and as we would not carry a traitor within our own

[1] Rom. xvi. 19. [2] Prov. iv. 23.

bosoms, we must in prayer and supplication, and by strong endeavour and with stedfast perseverance, abhor, and put away from us every thought which is contrary to the purity, and detrimental to the hopes of the Gospel. "Every man," as writes the beloved disciple, "that hath this hope in him," (the hope of being acknowledged hereafter as of the sons of God,) "purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[3] Let us recollect, my brethren, what our Saviour said, as recorded by St. Matthew, concerning the necessity of "cleansing first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."[4] Let us further call to mind, on this point, what, at another time, and in like reproof of the hypocrisy and sinfulness of the Pharisees, our righteous Master declared—even that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these," as he added,

[3] 1 John iii. 3. [4] Matt. xxiii. 26.

"are the things which defile a man."[5] And these are the fearful things which, commencing with unchecked "evil thoughts," with unruly desires, and indulged unlawful wishes, shall debase the soul unto hell, and awake "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that shall not be quenched."

Many an unfortunate individual, it may be said, had saved himself from the never-dying pangs of an accusing conscience; and the horrible depths of iniquity had not become known unto him; and he had not been so fearfully deprived of the grace of God, had he not allowed himself in the indulgence of unholy thoughts, and thoughts of folly; thus in his heart departing from purity and contentedness, and from those right principles of self-denial and patience, whereby, under the Divine blessing, the evil propensities of our fallen nature can alone be effectually checked, and ultimately conquered. It is indeed essential, would

[5] Matt. xv. 19, 20.

we "keep innocency," would we order ourselves according to the measure of St. Paul's example and teaching, "and exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men;"[6]—it is, we say, most needful that the precept, "Thou shalt not covet," be strictly observed, that it be allowed to have its due weight and influence on our every-day conversation with the world.

This commandment, this prohibition, "Thou shalt not covet," doth indeed strictly belong, it hath an especial reference, to the preservation of that "love," which, saith the apostle, "worketh no ill to his neighbour."[7] For the covetous man, the man that is dissatisfied, and envious, and restless, looks with an evil eye, and with wicked hankerings in his heart, at the condition and the possessions of others. He is in sullen jealousy disposed to think himself the unlucky and ill-used man; nay, he will quarrel with

[6] Acts xxiv. 16. [7] Rom. xiii. 10.

Providence, and will dare to question, and to say within himself—"Why hast thou made me thus?" Such an one, instead of "making a covenant with his eyes," instead of "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," will despise and act in direct opposition to St. Paul's charitable counsel, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."[8] For the man who doth "covet," the envious man, must needs be uncharitable, in the enlarged and christian meaning of the term; yea, he shall rejoice in iniquity, which charity does not;[9] and as an enemy he will exult, and think to raise himself on the fall of others. And yet, after all, after thus heaping up a heavy account against himself, and becoming abhorred of his God, and an alien from the covenant of grace,—is the envious man, is the covetous wretch in his best estate happy? Shall he ever

[8] 1 Cor. x. 24. [9] 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

"say to his soul, Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry?"[1] No! "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."[2] "It shall be even as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."[3] So shall the gnawings of envy not be appeased, and the cravings of covetousness shall be unceasingly renewed: contentment shall be far away; and even boundless wealth shall not purchase to that man happiness.

In mercy and in wisdom, then, hath it been commanded, "Thou shalt not covet." And be well persuaded, my brethren, that there is not a greater foe to our happiness, or to our personal enjoyment of the innocent and allowable things of this life, than the baneful spirit of envy, the evil desire

[1] Luke xii. 19. [2] Isa. lvii. 21. [3] Ib. xxix. 8.

of obtaining that which we see in the possession of others, or the mistrustful and discontented imagination that others are better off than ourselves, though with less merit. Alas! brethren, that we will not learn the happy lesson that "godliness with contentment is great gain."[4] Alas! that we will not consider this world, and the things of this world, as the word of God instructs us to view and estimate them. For after what, for the most part, is the unhallowed spirit of envy raised, and the forbidden thought of covetousness indulged? Even for those things which, experience could tell us, cannot of themselves satisfy, nor be enjoyed by us long. Of these things "we brought nothing into this world, neither may we carry anything out."[5] "They that will be rich," as St. Paul goes on to warn us, and we may add, they that would have all things and everybody bow to their wishes, "fall into temptation and a snare, and

[4] 1 Tim. vi. 6. [5] Verse 7.

into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."[6]

Therefore, brethren, as we "love life, and would see good days," we must "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."[7] We must "not covet." We must be willing to submit ourselves unto God, and to be ordered after the counsels of his will, assured that he knoweth what is best for us; and that inasmuch as the several and varying stations and degrees in life are, and were ever assigned to each individual according to the wise allotment of an overruling Providence—so are we to rest content, persuaded that our situation here below is one wherein we are not hindered in fulfilling the high and holy purpose for which we were created, and for which the love of God in Christ hath redeemed us. "Why then art thou so vexed, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted

[6] Verse 9. [7] Verse 11.

within me? O put thy trust in God."[8] "The foolishness of man," we are told, "perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord."[9] Unreasonable, for the most part, are our murmurings and discontents: and ungratefully do we, in a fitful mood of disappointment, or of envious hankering, overlook the good which yet remains to us: and so we sit down impatiently, and desire we scarcely know what, and in ignorance and folly we would free ourselves from those trials unto which, in a greater or less degree, all are born, which are necessary for our soul's health, and are mercifully calculated through faith to fit us for the kingdom of heaven.

Ah! my brethren, if instead of foolishly and restlessly coveting those gratifications, that sordid wealth, and those gaudy delights which are the fond and ensnaring pursuit of the carnal man; we would "covet earnestly," and study and strive to obtain the favour of God, and

[8] Psa. xlii. 14, 15. [9] Prov. xix. 3.

to "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven,"[1] then should we happily rise superior to all those paltry vexations, which create envy in the breast of the mere worldly man, causing him to be discontented with his lot, and forgetful that "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,"[2] that trials and sufferings are our decreed companions as we journey onwards through time to eternity.

Therefore, brethren, "in the race which is set before us,"[3] in the race which we must all run—let us not envy or rail at the good fortune which may be the lot of others; but let us be nobly emulous to be first in the race of goodness. Let it be our honourable ambition to "abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good."[4] Let us in nothing be more vexed, or more angry, than against ourselves, our own want of faith, and dili-

[1] Matt. vi. 20.
[2] Job v. 7.
[3] Heb. xii. 1.
[4] Rom. xii. 9.

gence, and perseverance in the right way; and that we are so cold in our love of heavenly things, the virtues and graces of the Gospel of Christ, and so easily turned aside "from the holy commandment delivered" to us. If, brethren, we are thus jealous and watchful over ourselves, we shall happily not so often fall into those sins which the apostle bids us to avoid when he says, "Thou shalt not covet." With respect to our neighbour, we shall desire and seek his good, and rejoice in his welfare always; and striving "to do our duty in that state of life unto which the providence of God hath called us,"[5] it will be our faithful endeavour "to follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which," as we are cautioned, "no man shall see the Lord."[6]

[5] Church Catechism. [6] Heb. xii. 14.

SERMON XVI.*

JOSHUA'S CHOICE.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

SUCH was the exhortation which the valiant and patriotic Joshua addressed to the assembled congregation of Israel, he being at that time well "stricken in age," and about to go the way of all flesh. He therefore calls for them in their families and tribes, the warriors of Israel, the mean and the noble, and recounts unto them all the singular and great mercies which God had vouchsafed unto them.

* This Sermon was preached on the first Sunday in the year.

They had witnessed the power, they had partaken of the marvellous lovingkindness of the Lord, and therefore were they to feel, and to be deeply and individually interested in the alternative which was here so plainly laid before them. They were to become well persuaded of the necessity of making a right choice, of making a noble and holy resolve to "serve the Lord."

We do not find that the people at that moment were inclined to dispute or cavil at the grounds upon which their grateful obedience was demanded. The circumstances under which they were placed, the knowledge that he who was now speaking to them was probably addressing them for the last time, conjointly conspired to render them open to conviction, and their hearts were evidently softened; and the spirit of turbulence and discontent, of misrule and worldly selfishness, was hushed; and the gallant and victorious bands of Israel stood forth as one

man to answer to the appeal of their great captain, and to declare, solemnly and unanimously to declare, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."[1]

A noble and a glorious determination this, my brethren; a resolution every way fitting and becoming a christian people, and which, as we would prosper, as we would not be utterly cast off by the Lord in displeasure, we must be prepared this day ourselves to make. Joshua, in this his admirable address, calls on his countrymen to make a choice. They were to choose whose servants they would be. In too many instances they had chosen the evil way. Too often had they shown themselves a faithless and stubborn generation, a set of men little deserving the tender regard, the pitying forbearance, so long in exercise towards them from the Lord. Nevertheless, they had been preserved; the good of all the land was now set before them; and now were they solemnly ad-

[1] Josh. xxiv. 24.

jured to decide, as became them, in regard to their future conduct.

It will not be unwise in us, my brethren, to place ourselves here in like manner before God, to consider well the choice which we on this very day are called upon to make, and to see the vast and important interests which may hang on the wisdom of a right choice; whether our determination be still to go after the gods of this world, or to resolve with the heroic Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua's countrymen had long been signal instances of that merciful forbearance and lovingkindness which the Almighty hath ever exercised towards the children of men. And what our faith, my brethren, what our knowledge, if we own not, and feel not, that to us also "the Lord is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and of great goodness"?[2] If, my brethren, we believe the truth of the Gospel, we must know

[2] Psalm cxlv. 8.

that therein are plainly set before us life and death, and good and evil. We must know, our own hearts must plainly tell us, that it is not through ignorance of what is right, or of what is for our interest, that we so often do what is wrong. No, the melancholy fact is, that we too often sin with our eyes open. We know the better way, but we will not exercise our better judgment; we will not summon up resolution enough to follow and adhere to this good way. And this is the more shameful and disgraceful, because that, in the greater number of instances of our yielding to temptation, and falling into sin, the provocation thereto is contemptible, the gratification very doubtful, the worldly profit small indeed, if any. Against those crimes which are of crimson hue and foul atrocity, the voice of society, outwardly Christian, and not yet wholly given up to atheism and profligacy, may deter us: and our own consciences likewise, not yet "seared with a hot iron,"

shall keep us from going all lengths with the abandoned reprobate. Thus may we lay the flattering unction to our souls, that we are still in the safe road; and, like the Pharisee of old, we may perhaps, in the pride and self-flattery of our hearts, "thank God that we are not as other men are."[3] But, alas! far, very far, may this be "from the kingdom of God!" whilst, such is the infatuation, men shall think, that for them "all is safe," although they deny themselves in scarcely any "ungodliness or worldly lusts," much less strive against—to put down—this or that their besetting sin.

When Joshua, however, addressed himself to claim the attention of Israel, he spoke of the covenant which the Lord God had made with them, and in which covenant were comprised small matters as well as great, things relating to the public weal, as also to the more ordinary and daily conversation and conduct. To that cove-

[3] Luke xviii. 11.

nant the people, in the happy hour of grateful affection and honest conviction, avowed their determination to adhere. And so, brethren, must we. In a happy and fortunate hour, even this very day, as we present ourselves before the Lord on the flowing tide of a new year, it shall be well for us to come to a like determination, and to witness against ourselves, that we choose the Lord this day to serve him. Most eventful to us must be the course of this year; it carries us onwards to the boundless ocean of eternity; and whether our frail bark is destined to outlive the storms and quicksands which shall beset this year's voyage—whilst this is known only to Him, in whose hands are "the issues of life and death"— yet know we that we are this moment living, and determining, as it were, for weal or woe everlasting. O let us not be "like the deaf adder which stoppeth her ears." Let us not go on stupidly and cowardly in our former ignorance and irresolution. It will not do. It shall not profit in the

end. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people who forget God."[4] What then shall be the fate of those who "profess that they know God, but in works deny him"?[5] And have we, brethren, no fears, no misgivings, as to what may be proved against us at the last? have we no apprehensions that it may then stand recorded against us, that often and often, and under a very slight temptation, we have "denied the Lord," have virtually, nay positively, refused obedience to the precepts of his Gospel; have in effect worked and slaved for that evil one, whose works "the Lord our righteousness" was "manifested to destroy"? O! be we "not deceived; God is not mocked."[6] It can never be too often repeated, that it is not in great matters only, but likewise in small, in private as well as in public, that our obedience is required. We are to be "holy in all manner of conversation."[7] It is "evil in

[4] Psalm ix. 17.
[5] Titus i. 16.
[6] Gal. vi. 7.
[7] 1 Pet. i. 15.

the sight of the Lord," it is a dangerous thing, to think to unite what our Lord himself hath pronounced to be impossible. "Ye cannot," are his words, "serve God and mammon."[8] And yet, notwithstanding this divine and positive declaration, how many shall be found—yea, christian men, and believers in a final state of rewards and punishments—how many shall be found, who will seek to blend the two! They desire heaven, but they love the world. They would avoid the pains of hell; but the pleasures of sin have strong and winning charms for them. And so they build up—if they think at all of the hazard, or the inconsistency of their scheme—they build up a sort of visionary time of reformation and godliness, when they will devote themselves wholly to the Lord to do his will; renouncing the ambitious projects, the mad follies, the unsatisfactory pursuits of a world, which, however they may now deceive themselves, is "a world lying in wickedness." With

[8] Matt. vi. 24.

this vague determination, nevertheless, the many shall be satisfied. They shall say to themselves "peace, and all things are in safety,"[9] whilst a "sudden destruction" may be bursting upon them; and in their sinful security they may be destroyed.

Therefore, brethren, Joshua's counsel, as also the decision of the people founded thereon, is to be read not as a resolution for the future only, not as a mere paltry measure of half obedience. When the people said unto Joshua, "We will serve the Lord," Joshua said unto them, "Put away therefore the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel."[1] "The heart and all the affections were to be mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts." "The unfruitful works of darkness" were to be at once, and utterly renounced; and the people were to "choose life," even present good, and everlasting happiness.

If, my brethren, we do really desire to

[9] Commination Service. [1] Josh. xxiv. 23.

attain unto "the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus," we must not only be alive to the worth, but weigh well the cost of the undertaking. In strong and marked language, and to prevent the disgrace of a failure, our Lord hath told us what must be done in order that we may "inherit eternal life."[2] When he says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life;"[3] when he saith, "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple;"[4] Christ would, in so speaking, show us the nature of the conflict carrying on between the world and God, between the flesh and the Spirit; and that he, who would come out victorious in the cause of his own imperishable soul, must be prepared against all extremities, must never be forgetful of his own high and immortal destiny, must be fully convinced that the gain of a whole world would be but a sorry and

[2] Mark x. 17. [3] Matt. vii. 14.
[4] Luke xiv. 33.

pitiful exchange for the loss of his own soul.

It is these, and such like reflections, which may, or ought, naturally to crowd upon us, whenever, not unmindful of the eternity unto which we are hastening, we look back upon the days we have already passed, and towards the probable future space of time which may yet remain to us. But O, how foolish and improvident is it to calculate upon any, the least portion of the future! If we, with God's grace, resolve to be good, to be for the future more attentive to our religious duties, less given to sensual indulgences, more sober and more discreet in our general conduct and behaviour—in a word, more watchful over ourselves according to the teaching of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ—we must resolve and act on the instant. We must, as the psalmist resolved, "make haste, and prolong not the time to keep the commandments of God." "Now," as the apostle

exclaims, "is the accepted time! now is the day of salvation!" [5]

Therefore, brethren, resolve we, and let us begin this new year well. Let us this day begin, and live throughout it, if God grant us this space of reprieve, as we shall have wished to have lived it, when the amount of our services, the extent of our trials, the temptations we have withstood, the self-denials we have exercised, shall be all brought forward, summed up, and appreciated not according to the world's fallible estimation, but by the unerring judgment of Him, "Who now seeing in secret, shall then reward openly."

A good beginning do they make, who are prepared this day * to present themselves before the Lord at his table, avouching themselves to be his servants by openly remembering him in the holy sacrament

[5] 2 Cor. vi. 2

* The Holy Communion is administered on the first Sunday in the year at the Dock-yard chapel, Malta.

of his own divine appointment. Surely on those who so attend and receive in faith, the blessing of God shall descend, the light of his countenance shall shine; and that which is needful for their soul's health shall be granted, if they persevere in the stedfastness and righteousness of their choice to obey the Lord, and to serve him with a grateful heart and a willing mind all the days of their life.

And let those who do not stay to communicate; let those who will still foolishly and perversely persist in declining to obey the invitation of their Saviour and their Lord; let those, likewise, who are yet "halting between two opinions"[6]—between the deceitful and treacherous temptations of the world, and the pure, the holy, and satisfactory service of HIM, the Almighty Eternal, who will one day "judge the world in righteousnes' "—let all such behold themselves and their future situation, and consider seriously what will then be

[6] 1 Kings xviii. 21.

their harrowing thoughts and vain regrets, if the Lord, in the supreme counsel of his unimpeachable will, were to "laugh" their senseless irresolution "to scorn," and to say, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"[r] O! believe we that our better resolutions, our intention to amend, our desire to live more "soberly, righteously, and godly," will not be strengthened by procrastination. "Choose ye then, brethren, this day, whom ye will serve." And whilst we would not so wrong your professed faith as Christians, nor your judgment as rational men, as to suppose there can be a doubt on the subject—you surely desire and would fain choose "life and good," not "death and evil?"—we would remind you, according to the words of our Lord, that "by their fruits shall men be known and judged hereafter;" that "if you would enter into life, you must keep the commandments;" you must "deny ungodliness and

[r] Luke xii. 20.

worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world:"[8] and finally, that in this matter, a matter of life and death, there must be no delay. "Behold," as the apostle writes, "the Judge standeth before the door;"[9] and the wise man's words are words of truth and soberness,—"Boast not thyself of to-morrow: for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."[1]

[8] Tit. ii. 12. [9] James v. 9.

[1] Prov. xxvii. 1.

SERMON XVII.

DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON.

1 CHRONICLES xxviii. 9.

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

IT was on no trifling occasion that the king of Israel delivered this wholesome and admirable charge to his son Solomon. In anticipation of his own approaching dissolution, about to go the way of all flesh, David with parental solicitude, in these his parting words, solemnly adjures the son of

his love to set himself right manfully to the work unto which God the Lord had called him. David herein affectionately exhorts his child to acquaint himself with the will and the commandments of God, that holy and eternal God who had so wonderfully prospered his father, and who had exercised such abundant loving-kindness and forgiveness towards him. And so knowing and understanding what the Lord would have him to do, Solomon was earnestly counselled to devote himself to the Lord, and to serve him cheerfully and faithfully, "with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind." And wherefore? Because the Lord Almighty, the God with whom David and his son, and all Israel, had to do, was surpassingly excellent, powerful, and supreme in all his incommunicable attributes, "searching all hearts, and understanding all the imaginations of the thoughts." "Thine, O Lord," as was David's devout acknowledgment at the conclusion of his ad-

dress, "is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all."[1] Therefore was the mighty and everlasting God to be honoured and obeyed. He was to be loved for his mercies, he was to be reverenced for his majesty, and feared on account of the infinite extent of his power. Whilst his promises of favour towards the willing and obedient were sure and stedfast, his threatenings of indignation and his denunciations of wrath against the impenitent and wicked were no less awakening and terrible. And David, with all the strength of a father's regard, would deeply engrave this truth on the mind of his son: "If thou seek him, he

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 11 12.

will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

Seasonable, my brethren, as all these words of king David were at the time they were uttered, and worthy to be had in remembrance by him to whom they were more immediately spoken; there is in them that honest counsel, that sound and plain advice, which must render their perusal and consideration beneficial at all times, and to all persons, profitable to the soul's health, "profitable unto all things," profitable for the present and for the everlasting happiness of man. Yes, brethren, it must be ever needful and healthful for us to "know God," the Lord God of our fathers, in order that we may "serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear;[2]"—"serve him," as David exhorts, "with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." The Almighty God claims this service of us on every principle of justice and love, of gratitude

[2] Heb. xii. 28.

and interest. "He made us, and not we ourselves;" and when, in the depth and strangeness of frowardness and folly, man had gone astray, and renounced his sonship, the beneficent and pardoning Creator brought him back again, purchased and reclaimed him for his own, according to the awful counsels of his own sovereign will, and by an act of immeasurable kindness.

But, my brethren, ere we can serve God in that full and spiritual measure which is demanded of us, the creatures of his hand, the offspring of his bounty, the redeemed by his love, we must give ourselves to know him. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."[3] Neither is this knowledge, the knowledge necessary to make us "wise unto salvation," of difficult attainment. The word of knowledge is in truth very nigh unto us, from

[3] Heb. xi. 6.

the least to the greatest. "As at no time, so undoubtedly not now, hath God left himself without witness."[4] In our favoured country, most especially, my brethren, the treasures of heavenly knowledge, the importance and saving worth of the riches of God's mercy in Christ Jesus, are spread before us with a large and lavish hand. The written record, the blessed revelation of God's good-will to man, is placed before us, is freely offered for our acceptance and study, to be our sweet solace and our sure counsellor from the first dawn of our reason. Ignorance, therefore, of our duties as Christians, ignorance of the way in which we ought to go, cannot in any wise be pleaded by those to whom schools are daily open, and who are weekly invited to the hearing, and the exposition of the sacred word of God. Attend then, brethren, and hear the words, and adopt the profitable advice of David—"Know thou the God of

[4] Acts xiv. 17.

thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind."

That his service, however, may be a willing and a pleasing service to us, our hearts must be perfect and right towards him; we must, that is, love him with an undivided affection; we must not allow any competition, any rivalry, in this our regard, our reverence, and our love. "The kingdom of God and his righteousness"[5] must first and principally be sought, and then may we innocently cherish, and follow all other lawful affections, desires, and pursuits. But God the Lord, and our Saviour Christ, must have no rival in our heart's best love. When the word from heaven speaks aloud, or drops into our ear, "This is the way; walk ye in it;" obedience must be promptly given, and unreservedly paid. There may, and there will, be from time to time many seducing adversaries, many strong obstacles springing up in the way.

[5] Matt. vi. 33.

The world and the flesh, sin and Satan, shall oppose themselves to cross our path, and to turn us aside from "the straight and narrow gate which leadeth unto life." But know we, and remember "the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The many adversaries, the many difficulties to turn us aside from the holy commandment delivered, — the many temptations and allurements unto sin, vanity, and folly,—what are they? What, at the utmost, can they give us? Riches, and honour, and luxury, and pleasure—even so—but for how long? or on what certainty dare we calculate on even the taste of these enviable (as we may think) good things? Nevertheless, granting the possession of these coveted objects—hear, brethren, and lay up deep in your hearts, for your daily meditation, for your profit in the hour of temptation—hear the cutting declaration, or retort of king David's son: "Rejoice, O young man,

in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."[6] This, brethren, this solemn and awful declaration of the wisest and most experienced of men, we ought ever to keep alive in our hearts, that it may come forward and speak to us, when duty calls one way, and passion and inclination clamour for the contrary path.

Behold! ye are free. The choice is with you to follow the corrupt desires of your sinful nature, or to obey the more honourable though rigid discipline of the Lord your God. But, my brethren, ere ye give yourselves up to the service of the devil, to go from bad to worse, until at length ye fearlessly "work all uncleanness with greediness," pause for one short moment, and, behold, place yourselves on your deathbed, and in all honesty ask

[6] Eccles. xi. 9.

yourselves, what shall *then* be your wish; and whether it will *then* content you, and give you firm peace of mind and "hope in the end," that you have gratified your every heart's lust, and followed to the full your vain imaginations. No! believe me; the world with all its pomps and vanity, its specious show and boastful bearing—if we have through these things been enticed from our duty, and from God—shall in the hour of mortal sickness and failing strength appear in its true colours, a lie, a disappointment, and a deceit; and stamping, as its fond trickery fades from before our eyes — stamping on our harrowed thoughts only "a fearful looking for of judgment."[7] Therefore, to avoid this terrible dismay, this dreadful shipwreck of the soul's enduring hope, "Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind:" accept him for thy Lord, and obey him as thy Master: "for HE is thy life, and the length of thy

[7] Heb. x. 27.

days:" and though friends may forsake thee, and enemies may oppress thee, and thy dearest and most honest purposes be thwarted and disappointed, yet shall HE, thy God and Father, still be with thee. "He will not suffer the righteous to fall for ever."[8] "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."[9] Yes! brethren, these, the Lord's "promises, are ever sure," and shall be spiritually fulfilled toward all those who happily know the Lord to serve him.

Furthermore, and for our comfort amidst those perplexities and misgivings

[8] Ps. lv. 2. [9] Isa. xliii. 1—3.

which may occasionally trouble and perplex us in our researches after the truth, we have in God, one "who searches all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts;" who looks there to view and to judge of our honest purpose, our determined resolve, to do his will; not "coveting the praise of men more than his praise;" not fearing the reproach, the revilings, the ridicule or opposition of men, more than the displeasure of him, who "hath power to cast into hell."[1] And, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?"[2] No, brethren, there is but one right and safe path for the christian pilgrim, the called of the Lord, to pursue, and this path must be followed, despite the unhallowed mockery of evil men, of the prevailing example of an ungodly multitude, or the silly conduct of the thoughtless and the wavering, the inconstant, and the luke-

[1] Luke xii. 5. [2] Isa. li. 12, 13.

warm in the faith. In the face of the world we are to avow and to take the Lord to be our God, we are to acknowledge and to confess Christ as our Saviour before men, and we are to seek to serve the Lord "with a perfect heart and with a willing mind" all the days of our life. We cannot enlist ourselves into his service too early. From childhood even to old age he requires our service. He hath offered to us his sustaining grace, and he will not fail in his promise. Whilst therefore he thus seeks us, we must be found of him; we must, as before said, seek and desire to know his will in order to do it.

Our church, my brethren, according to the primitive and apostolic institutions of the Gospel, demands of her younger members, that they do, in the face of the public congregation, take unto themselves the counsel, and openly assent unto the advice so affectionately, earnestly, and convincingly placed before them in the words of our text. This edifying ordinance, the

rite of confirmation, hath been recently witnessed in this place.* And however unexpected, and however unavoidably hurried as hath been the preparation of our younger brethren in order to their admittance to this solemn ordinance, yet we do trust that it hath not been without its edifying and wholesome effect, not upon those only who then offered themselves for the best blessing their church had to bestow, but also on those of older years who were present at the confirmation.

Let it not be doubted that they who did on the recent and happy occasion publicly take upon themselves their christian vows and obligations, did then do a work acceptable unto God, and sure to meet with his blessing in being "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner

* In January 1838, the right reverend Dr. Carr, bishop of Bombay, on passage to his diocese, confirmed in Malta 117 young persons, it being the first confirmation administered in the Island by a bishop of the Church of England.

man,"[3] in all, and upon all who thus called upon the Lord, and dedicated themselves unto him in the sincerity of their heart. At the same time we must here remark, and the observation, it is to be apprehended, may be particularly needful, and worthy the attention of no inconsiderable number of the present congregation; that the promises and vows made by their sponsors in their name at their baptism are binding upon them when arrived at years of discretion, although they may themselves never have taken an active or personal part in this really affecting and holy spectacle of the young publicly devoting themselves unto the service of their God and Saviour.

As baptized Christians, my brethren, and instructed also, if it be not our own fault, in the doctrines of our faith, we cannot release ourselves from the vows and obligations which are upon us. We are solemnly engaged to "deny ungodliness

[3] Ephes. iii. 16.

and worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."[4] This we are to do as we would have "hope in the end," as we would not be cast off, and denied of the Lord Jesus, when the temptations and vanities of this world shall be no more, and when the truth of the word, and the stability of the promises of God shall be incontrovertibly, gloriously, and everlastingly established. Therefore, brethren, remember ye the covenant of the Lord your God, study to know it, and determine with God's grace to do it. The alternative set before you is most awful and momentous, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

[4] Titus ii. 12.

SERMON XVIII.

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.

GENESIS xviii. 23—25.

"And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

THE favourable manner in which the Almighty was pleased to receive his servant Abraham's deprecation in behalf of a sinful people, of a people justly doomed and given over to destruction, is calcu-

lated, among other points, to give us a very cheering and consolatory view of the long-suffering and forbearance of our God; that "he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."[1]

Abraham, apprized through the condescension of the Lord that a decree had gone forth for the destruction of "the cities of the plain," draws near, as in the chapter of our text, unto the footstool of the Most Holy in expostulation and prayer. He addresses himself unto the Divine Majesty in the words just now recited, and wherein, whilst he feels the tenderest pity for the frailty and the danger of his fellow men, he is evidently deeply impressed, he has the strongest conviction in his own mind of the immutable justice and consummate holiness of Him, who had alone the power to rescue, or to pardon. "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" appears to

[1] Joel ii. 13.

have been Abraham's first thought as he contemplated the irresistible vengeance about to be launched forth against long continued, gross, and multiplied iniquity, —"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" No, that cannot be, —"The Lord's hand is not so shortened that it cannot save," that it cannot discriminate, and interpose to prevent one common destruction from utterly overwhelming alike the godly and the sinner, the righteous and the wicked:—"That," said the patriarch, "be far from thee to do after this manner." And not only so, but the knowledge of his Lord's goodness and forbearance towards his erring children makes the faithful Abraham yet more bold and urgent. He supplicates not merely for the righteous, but also for the wicked and the sinner. He beholds and shudders at the view of the immediate and horrible overthrow with which the fair and flourishing cities were to be visited; and as this was to be a common and universal

destruction, he scarcely sees how the godly few are to escape amidst this overthrow, except it be, that their righteousness be permitted to outweigh the offence of the guilty; that the Lord be pleased to spare the place for the righteous' sake.

And we read that the Almighty, in the infinitude of his goodness, did graciously incline his ear in this matter; that he did again and again listen to the expostulation of his servant, and suffered the threatenings of his wrath, the decree of his vengeance, to be so softened and narrowed, that in the end, at the last, the merciful reply was, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."[2] But alas! the chariot-wheels of God's just indignation and anger were not to be delayed. The devoted cities of the plain contained not even ten righteous: and when "Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord, and looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; he

[2] Gen. xviii. 32.

beheld, and lo! the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."[3]

Still, however, Abraham's conviction of the justice, and his reliance on the mercy of God; as likewise our faith in, our assent to Abraham's appeal, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" is not impeached, yea, rather, is strengthened thereby. For, "it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt."[4] Thus did God at that time, and thus will he ever, in the midst of judgment remember mercy. And whilst the records of his dealings with his ancient people solemnly forewarn the sinner of the danger of impenitency, unbelief, and hardness of heart;—bright and cheering is the hope, the comfort, and the instruction set before us in the same holy pages to look well unto ourselves and our own ways; and that, as we love

[3] Gen. xix. 28. [4] Ib. xix. 29.

our own souls, as we love our family, as we love our country, we must "follow after righteousness," and by renouncing the evil and doing the good, seek in all things to approve ourselves as the faithful servants of Him, who is so truly and magnificently represented unto us as "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." [5]

How strongly and beautifully, moreover, does Abraham's successful intercession in this passage of sacred history exemplify the declaration of St. James, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Ah! my brethren, we may neglect prayer, and despise the outward means of grace; and we may think foolishly with the scoffers, "what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" [6] and true it is, that our heavenly "Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him." [7] Nevertheless, the word of Scripture, nay, man's own involun-

[5] Deut. xxxii. 4. [6] Job xxi. 15. [7] Matt. vi. 8.

tary feelings, tell us that there are times, when prayer is man's sole stay, a refuge to which he is prompted to resort in the day of affliction and trial. How needful, then, how desirable, that we so live, so "order our conversation aright," that our "prayers be not hindered," that we may be able to "lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting!"[8] Abraham, in the integrity of his faith, approached unto God in prayer, and that not so much for himself as for others; and his prayer did not return unto him void. The righteous Lot was remembered amidst the overthrow; and so an answer of peace was given unto Abraham.

And although these be not the days of miracles, neither may we now demand visible interpositions of divine power; yet, brethren, we venture to demand of you, and with reference to the questioning put by St. James,—Why is it that we are so often weary to pray, and why is it that we

[8] 1 Tim. ii. 8.

"ask and receive not"? Is it not, because "we ask amiss;"[9] because we do not ask in a right and sufficiently humble frame of mind; because in the very act of prayer our hearts are cold, our thoughts wandering, and our imagination and desires worldly? Such was not Abraham's disposition of heart when he drew near to God, and said, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham, prayerful, and earnest as he was for the success of his suit, submitted himself to God, and reposed with undoubting confidence on the righteous justice of Heaven. It was God's will, and not his own, that he desired might be done: for his unalterable persuasion was, that "the Judge of all the earth would do right."[1]

Such, brethren, must be our firm conviction also: and then if our lives be after the example of Abraham's righteous faith, if we implicitly trust, as he did, in the truth and holiness of our God, much may be ex-

[9] James iv. 3. [1] Verse 25.

pected from the conjoined power of fervent supplication and practical godliness. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him; yea, all such as call upon him faithfully."[2] Yea! the Lord shall even be nigh to us, to succour and deliver us: although it may not please him to accede to the precise wish of our prayer. "He will not suffer the righteous to fall for ever."[3] In "the midst of the overthrow, when the fire of God's wrath shall be consuming and utterly annihilating the vain hopes of the impenitent sinner, the Lord will spare, he will rescue from the destruction "those that are his, and those who are holy."

And this, brethren, is another, and a very instructive lesson to be deduced from the consideration of this most awful transaction, and from the clear proof here afforded of the efficacy of Abraham's prayer. The cities of the plain would have been spared, had "ten righteous" been found therein;

[2] Psa. cxlv. 18. [3] Psa. lv. 22.

and although that small number could nowhere be found, yet, "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." The righteousness of ten would have saved the city; and righteous Lot did not perish in the destruction thereof. O! what an argument, my brethren, have we here furnished to us, and on what affectionate and patriotic grounds likewise, for individual holiness and personal sanctification. See what the well-disposed and faithful Christian may do for the welfare of his friends and the preservation of his country. The Lord for his sake may be pleased to bless, and not to punish; to spare in love, and not cut off in wrath. So true is it, so agreeable to the word of God, that the best Christian is the best patriot, and that whilst "righteousness exalteth a nation, sin is a reproach to any people."[4] And surely, brethren, we may look with some little emotion of christian exultation to the religious

[4] Prov. xiv. 34.

institutions of our country, to the support which they receive from the good men of our time; surely we may look, and with feelings of devout gratitude, towards those exalted spirits among our own countrymen who delight in honouring God, who desire that his name, and the truth and purity of Christ's Gospel, be established and promoted in the earth, and who in their own persons, and according to their means, set themselves to stay the torrent of vice and irreligion, of misrule and impatience. And may we not say, that thus hath our beloved country been blessed, signally blessed, with honour, and glory, and victory! And surely our reputation hath thus in some degree at least been the award pronounced of old—the reputation of being "a wise and understanding people."[5] O! remember we, and feel we, the certainty of the scriptural declaration already cited, "Righteousness exalteth a nation." And let us further remember, and be we ourselves inwardly strengthened

[5] Deut. iv. 6.

thereby to a steady perseverance in the right way—let us, I say, further, remember that the aggregate of good, the aggregate of public piety, and of national zeal for the glory of God, is made up of single, it may apparently be, of unrecorded acts of individual devotion to the cause of true religion and virtue. Therefore are we so to assist individually; therefore are we to look unto ourselves, and to see that our own ways and doings, and the thoughts and intents of our own hearts, be right, and agreeable to the word of God. And then, brethren, come what will, our hope will be stedfast, our confidence immovable, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." Although "iniquity may abound," and the flood of ungodliness may be strong and overwhelming—even to the turning away of the face of the Lord from that nation and people—yet shall the Lord, amidst the fierceness of his anger, remember his servants to save them, if not with temporal deliverance, yet with an everlasting salvation. He will separate

between the tares and the wheat, he will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. "It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow."

Such, in truth, shall be to us the profit and the worth of our own righteousness. With God's blessing, and in his graciousness and kindness, our prayers for the public weal, and our own steady and exemplary walking in the ways of godliness, shall not be without effect; they may be the instrumental cause of good to others. Should however this not be the prosperous issue, should sin and iniquity so abound as to weigh down, and frustrate the patriotic and christian endeavours of the pious, the loyal, and the well disposed,—this are we to know, that the Almighty will in the end surely remember the righteous "for good." And wherefore? for their own worth and deservings; and because there hath been "no error or fault found" in them? "Who, then, alas! can

be saved?"—But as in the day of God's vengeance against "the cities of the plain," an intercessor was found successfully to plead to the salvation of righteous Lot: so now the righteous man, the faithful and obedient Christian, hath "an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ,"[6] and he is an all-prevailing Intercessor. And there will be rescue and deliverance and a remembrance in favour of the godly, when this "earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up"[7] by the fiery flood which shall then overwhelm the wicked. And then, when the throne shall be set, and the books shall be opened, and judgment shall be had upon all flesh; then, to the condemnation of the impenitent sinner, and to the everlasting joy of the obedient believer, it shall be seen and confessed, that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right."

[6] 1 John ii. 1. [7] 2 Peter iii. 10.

SERMON XIX.

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE.

LUKE xiii. 6, 7.

"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

THE intent or purport which our Lord had in view, when he delivered this parable of the barren fig tree, cannot be easily mistaken; although, as the commonest observation on the ways of the world will certify to us, men in general sit down and make themselves very easy under the divine lesson here taught—and taught from

the mouth of Him, who would not "that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The apostle Peter, as we may recollect, repeats the lesson concerning God's mercy and love towards us to be acquired from this parable of our Lord, when he counsels us to "account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation."[1] It is indeed salvation unto all, who continue not slow to understand the lovingkindness of the Lord, but are happily alive to the patience and forbearance which the Almighty daily exercises towards the creatures of his bounty, and who further duly and gratefully value that precious gift of lengthened days, which God "giveth or denies severally to every man as he will."

But who, my brethren,—who that looks back with serious thought on his past life, however brief the space, who can call to mind, trying himself by the word of the Gospel, the things done and said

[1] 2 Peter iii. 15.

in the body, and will not have abundant reason to confess that he is a miracle of God's mercy and forbearance? Times without number hath he been in effect a traitor to his God, and a rebel against his authority. He hath been careless of the means of grace; he hath closed his eyes to the light of truth; he hath hardened himself against the pleadings of his conscience; he hath lived for present things only, reckless and regardless of the "one thing needful," and of the account which shall be demanded of him hereafter. Wherefore then hath he been spared? Wherefore hath the sinner and the rebel been reprieved from that judgment of condemnation which he hath so perseveringly, and obstinately, and daringly challenged to himself? Brethren, "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."[2] Nevertheless, however great, however long, however

[2] Lament. iii. 22.

enduring as are the compassions and the tender pity of our heavenly Lord and Master; yet the parable, to the instructive purport of which we are the more immediately addressing ourselves as illustrating an important Gospel truth, solemnly bids us to understand the possibility of outstaying our day of grace, "when it shall be too late to knock, the door being shut, and too late to cry for mercy, when it is the time of justice."[3]

The sentence had gone forth against the unfruitful fig tree, the word of condemnation had been pronounced, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" and when the reprieve was sought for and obtained, there was an express reserve and limitation, as to the continuance of that mercy—"If it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." So far then should escapes from danger, and providential deliverances—recoveries from sickness, and

[3] Commination Service.

renewed strength, be from causing us to become self-confident or careless for the future, that they ought, they are intended, to make us more wise, more wary, and more prudent, and that we thus admonished should henceforward walk more holily. "Behold," saith Jesus to the man cured at the pool of Bethesda, "thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."[4] Every added day of our lives should in fact be received by us as an inestimable gift of the free grace and bounty of Him, who delayeth to strike, because he is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."[5]

And whom, my brethren,—whom are we to understand as portrayed in this parable, supplicating and petitioning for the unfruitful and unprofitable tree? Certainly none other than "the Lord our righteousness," Jesus, the Saviour of men, even he who now standeth, and now inter-

[4] John v. 14. [5] Joel ii. 13.

poseth between us and the just anger of an insulted God. Jesus of his love and his pity made atonement for our sins, and "now ever liveth to make intercession for us." This part of the parable, indeed, appears to be well calculated to impress us with a becoming sense of the value, the high and inestimable value, of that mediation and that successful intercession which Christ made and offered to the Father, when, in the unfathomable counsels of the Supreme will, the cross was elevated at Calvary bearing the spotless body of one, who suffered and died, "the just for the unjust," that "he might put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."[6] "In him," and for this cause, "the Father was well pleased," and delivered and confirmed to him "all power in heaven and in earth."

Take we, however, earnest care that we seek to repay in some sort the blessing and

[6] Heb. ix. 26.

the advantages of that intercession which the beloved Son "hath put forth for us." When "God shall be all in all," when the mediatorial kingdom of Christ shall be at an end; then shall the unbelieving, and the abominable, and the reprobate be given over to just punishment, even by their now merciful Lord and Intercessor.

The dresser of the vineyard, entreating for yet another year of grace, said, "If it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." What madness, then, and folly in the extreme, is it to trifle away, as do so many, the space granted to man here on earth to prepare and to fit himself for a blessed eternity in heaven. "To-morrow," on this earth, shall not for ever return to us. We know this, we confess to it; we dare not deny it, and yet we live as though we thought, as though we were indubitably assured, "that our houses should continue for ever:" or at least that there would always be time

enough, and space granted to make our peace with God, before we "go hence, and be no more seen."

And, brethren, let us observe further the wording, the conditions, or the terms, on which a reprieve was conceded to the unproductive fig tree, "If it bear fruit, well." We may not then reckon on the efficacy of a deathbed repentance. God forbid that any mortal man, himself a sinner, should venture to set bounds to Heaven's high prerogative of mercy, or limit the reach of that Almighty arm, again and again stretched out to save. Even at the eleventh hour it is not for a fellow-worm to say, it is too late! But it is in itself a sin to presume thereon. And were we to advocate without reserve the entire security of a deathbed repentance, it would be tempting men to do that which St. Paul states only to put down most forcibly, as being highly sinful, namely, "to continue in sin that grace

may abound."[7] For to what indeed doth the Gospel throughout exhort? In what did its preaching commence? And where shall we find, in any one page of that hallowed gift of God to man, the slightest inference that there exists not the positive necessity of "adding to our faith virtue," of continually "going on unto perfection"? The bold and impassioned preacher of repentance, John the Baptist, when he addressed himself to the congregated throng on the banks of Jordan, distinctly and earnestly called upon the people to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." And the words of the Saviour himself are to the same effect, and ought ever to be fresh in our recollection: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he which doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."[8]

We venture then to speak of this, the latter part of the parable, as a wholesome

[7] Rom. vi. 1. [8] Matt. vii. 21.

warning against the putting off from day to day that work which can only best be done without delay. Delay, my brethren, in this matter, a putting off in the great and required duty of "ceasing to do evil and learning to do well," must not be thought of: no! not for one moment. "Thou fool, this night thy soul may be required of thee!" What then shall become of all thy self-deceiving promises of one day turning unto God, of receiving warning sufficient, and of having time enough for that work,—a work so vast and important as it really is,—that a whole lifetime can scarcely be said to be ample enough for its due and effectual performance. But do men, preposterous as the thought is, make a merit of devoting their latter days to God and religion! or do men think, do they call that reformation—the persisting no longer in this or that sin, when their powers of indulgence in it are over? when their "feet stumble upon the dark mountains,"[9] when they find themselves

[9] Jer. xiii. 16.

on the very brink of the grave, and the world no longer presents itself to their carnal senses in the dangerous excitement of joyous youth and high animal spirits? What act of self-denial, my brethren, do we then exercise? or in what do we then show our devotedness to God? in regard, that is, to our moderation in worldly matters—when neither health nor strength is with us to enjoy, and "the evil days are come, in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."[1] "If," as runs the expostulation in Malachi, "ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person, saith the Lord of Hosts."[2] The common sense of the most careless Christian should thus show him the vanity of making sure that the last dregs of a life, worn out with the excesses of profligacy and sin, can either with good hope of profit, or of undoubted acceptance, be offered as

[1] Eccles. xii. 1. [2] Mal. i. 8.

our "reasonable service," and as the full and satisfactory payment of all that the Lord doth require of us.

No, brethren, whilst we limit not the infinite compassions of our Lord and Saviour, let us be very strict and rigorous in looking into and reforming ourselves without loss of tim. Let us not presume on the forbearing mercy of the Almighty and gracious and Holy One, extended as that loving-kindness hath been to us from our cradles, and prolonged to us even unto the present moment, in the which we are all here more immediately in the presence, and under the all-discerning eye of Him, who might long since have summoned us away in the high career probably of many an overweening lust.

"Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" are words of fearful import. And where, brethren, is our warrant, that even before the setting of to-morrow's sun, the sentence may not be issued forth against us? How know we, or can we

dare affirm, that this year, running on as it does ceaselessly to its close, is not to us the last and closing year of grace: the year granted to us to produce, to show forth in our lives, "the fruits of righteousness"—and "if not, then to be cut down"?

Therefore, brethren, is this parable of the unfruitful fig tree, and indeed the greater part of this 13th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, to be read, as strongly urging and counselling us to "make no tarrying, to turn unto the Lord," and without further delay to seek earnestly to know, in order to do, his will. The language, at the same time it may be observed, in which we are here addressed, is not to be understood as the language either of despair, or of irretrievable dismay, but of urgency suitable to the importance of the need, and conveyed in words worthy of that affectionate pleading, which saith once and again, "Lord, let it alone this year."

Brethren, we are yet alive, we are yet for

a moment spared, we are not yet cut down, and gathered for the burning, though in truth we be cumberers of the ground. It would, therefore, be wise in us so to consider ourselves, as continuing here merely under sufferance, as being yet here on trial, as living under a reprieve. The sentence of death is indeed passed upon us, but through faith and repentance, and the care and the love of our gracious Intercessor, the eternal severity of its infliction may be wholly removed. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;"[3] who show forth, that is, in their lives, the fruits of a saving faith, becoming "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified."[4] Over such, "the second death hath no power;" and they, happily for themselves, shall be found to have attended to the word spoken, and to have profited by the mercies so con-

[3] Rom. viii. 1. [4] Isa. lxi. 3.

tinually vouchsafed to man. In a word—they have been, "not faithless, but believing." And looking for "the righteous judgment of God," they have "made haste, and prolonged not "the time to keep the commandments of God."[5]

[5] Psalm cxix. 60.

SERMON XX.

TO RUN WITH PATIENCE.

HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."

THE apostle had in the preceding chapter been speaking largely and eloquently of that trust in God, that perseverance under difficulties, that resistance to temptation, that fortitude, and "patient continuance in well-doing," which had been evidenced by the faithful in all preceding generations. And from the consideration of this, their noble example, St. Paul would lead and persuade us to a like constancy and righteous perseverance, "having respect,

as they had, unto the recompense of the reward."[1] And the reward laid up for those who are "faithful unto death,"[2] is nothing transitory, or uncertain. We are to have in view, we are to look unto One, who is far above all the worthies and righteous men of old time; we are to look unto Jesus, unto his bright example, unto the life which he led upon earth, as also unto the glorious consummation of that his labour of love; and so looking, so considering him, "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself," "we are not to be weary nor faint in our minds,"[3] but we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

And a very beautiful and appropriate figure is this, the comparison of a Christian's life to a race. For herein are included the necessity of preparation and of discipline, a strict attention likewise to the object in view, and a due observance of

[1] Heb. xi. 26. [2] Rev. ii. 10. [3] Heb. xii. 3.

the laws of the course. Essential is this, if the competitor would be hailed as the victor. "If a man," as the apostle observed to his beloved disciple, "strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."[4] And equally essential are the primary steps,—"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."[5] There is further another feature to be mentioned, which renders the comparison just and applicable, and that is the like brief duration of man's life, and of the contest on the course. Eager and deep as may be our attention, highly as our expectations may be raised, yet how soon is the course run, and when the race is over, how soon does all the bustle and the restless agitation thereof cease! And what is life? but like to the pathway of an arrow through the air, or the track of a ship in the sea. Yea, "man cometh up, and is cut down like a flower, he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."[6] Why, then, seeing it is like

[4] 2 Tim. ii. 5. [5] 1 Cor. ix. 25. [6] Burial Service.

a race soon over, the duration of a moment, and flitting even as a passing cloud, why is there so much care, and preparation, and discipline, and perseverance, requisite that we may run well?

Exhortations to this end would indeed be unnecessary, my brethren, did the consequences expire with the race of life, and were success or failure alike transitory in the joy, or the shame. This may be the case on earth; but it is far otherwise in the race set before us, and to be run by every Christian competitor. We, my brethren, are placed on a course whose goal is eternity, and the reward, the crown for which we contend is an incorruptible, an heavenly crown. And whilst on the earthly course only "one receiveth the prize,"[7] in the christian race all who run may obtain. There are chaplets innumerable, and rewards without number. And if the rules prescribed are observed, if the appointed course be run lawfully, there is laid up for every christian com-

[7] 1 Cor. ix. 24.

petitor a crown of righteousness, "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give" in the great day of victory and triumph. Glorious, however, and certain as is the reward laid up in store, and brief as may be the time allotted for the accomplishment of the race of life, yet do we read of the necessity of patience.

We are to "run with patience the race that is set before us." And need is there of this, "lest we be weary and faint in our minds." For, alas! in the weakness and short-sightedness of human nature we too often err in our estimation of, and we wilfully close our eyes to the shortness of the race to be run, and thus fail in constantly keeping in view the greatness and the enduring nature of the rewards to be attained.

In the morning, or in the noon-day of life, we flatter ourselves that we have a long course of years before us, and that there is ample time, and time to spare, ere we need think of that goal at which we see others continually arriving, and

to which we deny not that we too must come at last. Therefore, as regards ourselves, we will not just now view that goal as nigh at hand, and for a space we are determined, as it were, to "take our ease, to eat, drink, and be merry;"[8] little thinking how imperceptibly a love of ease, and an inaptitude for wholesome and required exertion, may steal upon us, and in the end render us wholly unable to reach the desired goal either with honour or success. And we have "need of patience." For, again, be we ever so well disposed in our hearts, and desirous of doing the will of God, yet are there many adversaries, many objects, many temptations, to distract our attention and to draw us aside, which may cause us to run another course than that which is prescribed in the Gospel of Him, who stands at the end of the race, to receive and welcome those who "so run as to obtain."

To point out, however, the obstacles which oppose themselves, and which may

[8] Luke xii. 19.

hinder our successful progress, would be to enumerate the many ways in which the world, the flesh, and the devil, tempt the thoughtless, the improvident, and the indolent, to make light of the sacred nature and obligation of their christian vows, and to forget, or undervalue the rewards promised to the Christian who is "faithful unto death." Neither does the apostle, so warm is he in his exhortation, stop to bring forward, or to denounce any one particular instance, wherein this or that man may be liable to fail, and to be turned aside from virtue and holiness. His exhortation is general. He exhorts, that we "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." He leaves the application to ourselves, "every man to know and to confess to himself the plague of his own heart."[9] He would doubtless have each of us narrowly examine into, and ascertain his own particular weakness, or sinful inclination, the many occasions likewise, and the causes

[9] 1 Kings viii. 38.

arising from this or that particular profession, or calling, or company, or time, in which the sinful temptation may have then a greater power, and against which, therefore, we ought more especially to be on our guard.

If, my brethren, we could be persuaded to institute an impartial and honest examination as to the several causes whereby we do so frequently become transgressors against the holy law of God, there would be a good probability that we should discover what is that strong and besetting sin which is at once our bane and our delight; whether it be pride, or anger, the love of pleasure, the desire of worldly gain, the love of vain applause, or the coward and groundless fear of being singular in obeying God.

Unfortunately, however, we are averse to do this; we are reluctant to examine into our own lives, and to confess even to ourselves that we are weak and inexcusable, not only in our transgressions, but also in our omissions of duty. We hate the

trouble and the pain of reflection; and thus are we all our life-long clogged and hindered, if not wholly turned aside, in our christian course. The christian race as set before us is, to many, it may be said, more an aversion than a joy; and "the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus," is under such chilling influence scarcely thought of, is certainly not valued as it deserves to be. And the many foolish, glittering, and sinful objects which surround us at our entrance on the christian course, will accompany, and charm, and distract us to the very end, and be our ruin; unless we resolutely, and in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, lay aside this hindrance, this weight, and the sins which do the more continually beset us, and which must not be allowed so frequently and shamefully to obtain the mastery over us.

And for what more particularly were the worthies recorded in the chapter preceding our text commended, but because

they were strong in faith, and did not allow any coward fears, any negligence on the post of duty, any worldly enticements, any plausible temptations, to bring disgrace on their manner of conversation and life? "They were strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."[1] They were persuaded of the truth and the stability of the promises of God, and embraced them, although they only saw them "afar off." And they lived and died under the conviction and confession "that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Faith in them was an all-enduring principle, and it carried them triumphantly unto the goal, conquerors over all the vexations, the hardships, and persecutions, which it had been their lot to encounter.

But, my brethren, in regard to the ridicule or present opposition of wicked and ungodly men, with respect to the exercise of the virtues of faith and humility, of pa-

[1] Eph. vi. 10.

tience and constancy in doing the will of God, we have a higher example, a more splendid standard of excellence than was ever in existence previous to the revelation and the preaching of the Gospel. We have Jesus, the Saviour and the appointed Judge of men, for our guide and teacher and great exemplar. He "hath left us an example that we should follow his steps"[2] in the performance of every active duty, and in every passive virtue. We are expressly told that he was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;"[3] and we are counselled to meditate on the long-suffering and patience of Him "who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself."

What, indeed, can be the utmost extent of our troubles compared with "his sorrow"? Or what—to descend lower—can be the fiery nature of our temptations and trials in comparison with the sufferings of those who have gone before us, the

[2] 1 Peter ii. 21. [3] Heb. iv. 15.

many worthy confessors and martyrs to the truth, who, having "fought a good fight, having kept the faith, finished their course," even as did the first martyr St. Stephen after the example of his Lord, blessing and praying for his blood-thirsty persecutors. "Ye," saith St. Paul, "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." O no! our resistance to an evil example, our strivings against temptation and against sin, our resolve to confess Christ before men, and honestly to keep his commandments, bring us not into any such extremity of cruel suffering. How long, or how many of us would be "faithful unto death," were this alternative proposed to us, we stop not now to inquire. We are, to our shame be it spoken, at this present time turned aside from the straightforward path of faith and duty—we are impeded in our christian course—by obstacles at once contemptible in themselves, and powerless *of* themselves. And too often do we

yield to temptations the most insignificant, thin as a gossamer web in strength, and which, if we would but "resist the devil,"[4] would be found light as the passing shadow.

Scandalous, then, is our want of faith, and disgraceful our lack of resolution, and sinful and culpable in the extreme the timidity, or the easiness with which we give up our christian principles, our love for, and our holding fast by, "the truth as it is in Jesus." And O! most guilty is the inclination so frequently felt and entertained to be offended at the doctrines of a self-denying Gospel, and the commands of a Saviour crucified for us! Granted, that our chastisements and afflictions, the trials and disappointments which befal us, are far from pleasant, are actually troublesome and painful to flesh and blood, mortifying to our worldly pride, and disquieting to our self-love—what of that?—"No chastening," as we are told in this very chapter of our text, "for the

[4] James iv. 7.

present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." And further, and as especially applicable to these present days, the words of the same apostle, when writing to the Corinthians, ought to be most firmly fixed in our minds as altogether true and undeniable: "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."[5]

Wherefore, my brethren, let us comfort ourselves, and one another, with these words. Let us be strengthened in our honest and virtuous resolves by this assurance, that the joy, the gain, the triumph, and the glory is our own, is already within our reach, if we are but true to ourselves, and to our own everlasting interests. For to be true to ourselves, to be true to our own best

[5] 1 Cor. x. 13.

and everlasting interests, we must be true to the religion of the Gospel, to the faith revealed and preached in Christ Jesus. And that religion, that faith, counsels and instructs us to compare this life with that which is to come, to weigh time against eternity, to "look not so much at the things which are seen, as at the things which are not seen."[6] For it comforts and supports the true believer with the knowledge and assurance, that "when our earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."[7]

And this reward, this glory awaiting the good in another world; this change of the corruptible for incorruption,—this clothing of immortality upon perishing matter,—these enduring treasures, this superabundant happiness, and which, as it is emphatically expressed, "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have en-

[6] 2 Cor. iv. 18. [7] 2 Cor. v. 1.

tered the heart of man,"[8] adequately or worthily to conceive,—these are secured to us on the unchangeable word of Almighty God,—are sealed unto us by the precious blood of Christ,—are confirmed unto us by the resurrection of Jesus, our Lord, who on the cross paid the required price, and came back from the grave victorious, bearing in his hands the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

"Wherefore," my brethren, "we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear."[9] Let us pray for grace and strength manfully to endure unto the end "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." O! beware we of the contagion of an evil example, beware we lest we be overcome by the secret, as well as the open temptation. Be we on our guard against "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes," and that love of present ease and enjoy-

[8] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [9] Heb. xii. 28.

ment, which proved so fatal to Esau, who, as the apostle tells us in the chapter of our text, "for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right." Let us remember unto what we have been created and redeemed, even unto "good works." And we are to be kept stedfast to our duty, we are to be animated unto "a patient continuance in well doing," by the prospect of that joy, even "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore," which God hath prepared for them that love him," and which Christ will give to those who love and obey him now, "running with patience the race that is set before them."

In condescension to the infirmities of our mortal nature, in condescension to our present finite understanding, Jesus Christ is said himself to have been encouraged and animated to his vast and meritorious labour of redeeming the world, and opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers, by the prospect of the exaltation and the triumph which were to be his, when he

should "have gotten himself the victory." "For the joy," so we read, "that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." Well therefore may the exceeding value of the recompense held out to us, if we successfully finish our Christian race, well may the rewards for approved fidelity at the completion of this life's pilgrimage, strengthen and persuade us to endure, despising and getting above the peril and the shame thrown in our way; whether by "the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience," or more immediately and outwardly by those "evil men and seducers," who "know not God," and who, virtually denying the power, the truth, and the love of Jesus, the Son of God, choose "not to obey the Gospel."

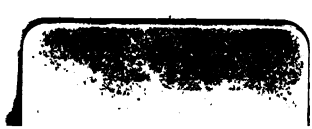
"In patience," then, my brethren, let us "possess our souls," and we shall be "blessed, if we endure." "Be patient, brethren," saith St. James, "unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the hus-

bandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."[1] The utmost stretch of our lives is less, infinitely less, than a span long, in comparison with the countless ages of eternity; and the utmost privations that we can be called upon to endure on earth, are not for one moment to be weighed against those riches which are at God's right hand for evermore. And let us again and again ask ourselves, in the words of Christ in his Gospel, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"[2] Therefore let us so "run with patience the race that is set before us," let us so practically keep in view the love of Jesus manifested in our behalf, the triumph also which he achieved, and the power over us which he hath of right acquired, that

[1] James v. 7, 8. [2] Mark viii. 36.

through his all-prevailing merits ours hereafter may be the inheritance of "glory and honour and immortality." In a word, let us ever, as was the apostle's noble resolution, "press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus:"[3] being "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."[4]

[3] Phil. iii. 14. [4] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

THE END.

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